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THE PREY OF THE GODS.

A Novel.

BY FLORENCE MARRYAT,

(MRS. ROSS CHURCH)

AUTHOR OF "LOVE'S CONFLICT," "VERONIQUE," "HER LORD AND MASTER," ETC., ETC.

"Where, when the Gods would be cruel,
Do they go for a torture?—where
Plant thorns, set pain like a jewel?
Ah! not in the flesh, not there!
The rocks of the earth, and the rods
Are weak as foam on the sands;
In the heart is the prey of the Gods,
Who crucify hearts—not hands."
A. C. SWINBURNE.

"If the sense is hard
To alien ears, I did not speak to these.
No, not to thee, but to thyself in me."—TENNYSON.

IN THREE VOLUMES.

VOL. III.





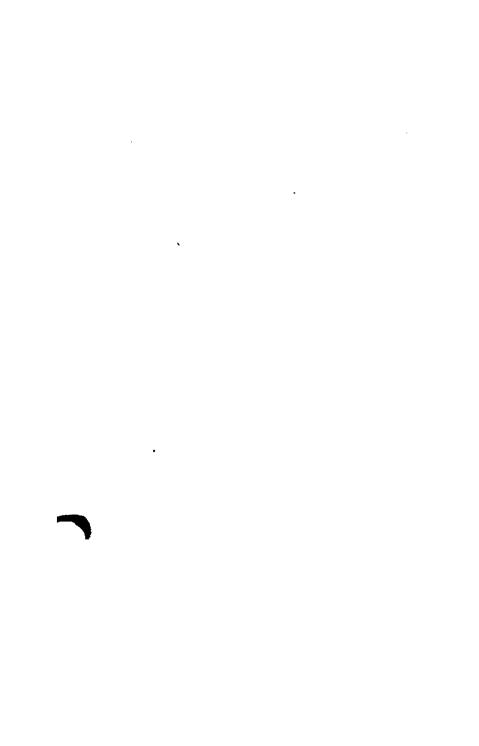
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THE PREY OF THE GODS.

CHAPTER I.

PERPLEXING DOUBTS.

NEVERTHELESS her heart is troubled, and her mind ill at ease; and long after Miss Ward and Emily Musgrave, and the remainder of the household have retired to rest, Gwendoline Gwynne sits by the open window of her sleeping chamber, gazing out upon the tranquil starlit night, and wondering whether this unexpected alteration in her life will be for good or evil.

Will she never cease to be haunted by the remembrance of the past? Is its phantom doomed to cross her daily path? Can she find no refuge from Auberon Slade, and the memory of what he has been to her?

Here had she settled herself, as she supposed, in peace; far from the busy world of London; out of earshot of its turmoil and its tongues of scandal; out of reach of its incessant round of business or of pleasure; and yet even here, at the extremity of England, environed by miles of country road, and hidden in unfashionable obscurity, has he discovered, tracked, and followed her; not to administer comfort, but only to open her old wounds afresh. Are not retired places sufficiently abundant in the land, that he needs must pounce upon the little haven she has found out for

herself, and change the quiet and contented life that she has led there thitherto, into a scene of envy and repining? What can he mean by it? what object have in view in coming there? what comfort hope to draw from a contemplation of her distress?

As Lady Gwynne tries to picture what her future life will prove, when not a moment in the day will leave her free from the fear of encountering either himself or his wife; of meeting them upon the road or receiving them in her own house, she grows more and more disposed to blame the author of her trouble.

It was inconsiderate, cruel, unmanly of him to have engaged Fernside without a single reference to her feelings on the subject; and though (moved by the sudden pathos of his appeal for a continuation of her friendship) she has promised to do all



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turn she takes. First, as the inanimate and stolid girl, which Lady Gwynne has always imagined her to be; sulky in temperament, difficult to please, disgusted with the dulness of the country, and very exigeante with regard to the amount of attention to be paid her by her husband.

Could she like her if she appeared under such a guise—even bring herself, by force of charity, to appear interested in any of her occupations or pursuits? Lady Gwynne thinks of it, shudders, and turns away.

But then she sees her bright, lively, and fashionable — but uneducated, unrefined, of a grade lower than her own; and feels that the first impersonation would be preferable to the last.

Will she be satisfied (so she asks herself) if she finds that the bride, although possessing divers faults, is devoted to her husband,

hangs on his words, follows his looks, anticipates his wishes, *loves* him, in short, as a woman *can* love.

But at this picture she sighs heavily, and covers up her face with both her hands; yet cannot persuade herself she will be better pleased if Mrs. Slade proves indifferent and cold; heedless of Auberon's comfort; unmindful of his wishes; if she is the means of making him, as he said to-day he already felt himself to be, unhappy? Oh, if she be so, the wife should witness the dark indignant flush that rises to another woman's cheek in rebuke of her supposed indifference! But it is useless: believe her to be what she may; even as her final thoughts present her, an honest, kindly, warm-hearted girl, pleased with everything around, and more than honoured by the station to which she has been raised, Lady

Gwynne cannot persuade herself that she will ever be found capable of rousing her affection, or bestowing any particle upon her in return. It would be unnatural; an anomaly, such as had never been seen in the world before, that she should include this woman, whatever she may be, in the circle of her friends, and bid her hearty welcome.

And yet she has promised to do so; and above all other virtues, the truth of Gwendoline Gwynne rises pre-eminent. She has promised to do all she can to serve him.

Let it be so, then, at whatever cost to herself. She is not one to go back from her word, and feels that after what she has already passed through, she must have strength enough for anything! And after all, it is his cruelty, his want of feeling she should blame, for his wife, whatever her shortcomings, has taken but a passive part

in increasing the burden of her pain; and can know nothing of incidents in the past life of her, to whom she will be so soon desired to hold out the right hand of friendship.

It is he that has inflicted this fresh wound on her—who so recklessly spears the heart he has already trampled in the dust. It is his presence alone which she should fear to meet.

And yet, perhaps, he needs her—feels, now that it is too late, that a little patient resignation on his part would have reaped a fuller harvest than life can ever yield him in the future; and yearns for her sympathy, her help, her counsel, the only boon which it remains to her to give him. Shall she refuse it?

Shall she?—Can she?

Witness her swelling breast, her throbbing heart, her humid, liquid eyes turned up so steadfastly, and yet so mournfully, towards the placid summer moon.

She does not cry; for though Gwendoline Gwynne has almost learned to be contented with her lot, and appear so before others, tears and laughter are alike unknown to her (it appears as though she had outlived such strong expression of her feelings), but she devotes a few moments to the memory of the past, and thanks God at the close of them that He has left her still a duty, however trifling, to perform for him, who yet remains (notwithstanding all her efforts to displace him) the dearest creature in the world to her.

Yes, she will do it for his sake! She will not shrink back from the promise she has made—she will be brave (she knows she can be), and meet him and his wife upon new ground; as two friends who have

been recommended to her notice and consideration, but whose characters she has yet to learn, and amalgamate with her own.

And then she rises from her seat of contemplation, and goes to her prayers, refreshed and calm; more, almost glad, that events have been so ordered that the last link between her life and Auberon Slade's is not yet snapped asunder. But let no one mistake her satisfaction, which arises from the knowledge, not that her unlawful inclinations are about to be indulged, but that she has been enabled to overcome a feeling which she knew to be unworthy of her.

She has no unlawful inclination remaining in her breast. There couch sore trouble, keen disappointment, and a bitter memory; but she would not so much as place her hand within the grasp of Auberon Slade if the touch called forth one desire which she believed it wrong to cherish. For during the last few months a great change has passed over her soul; religion has made its final powerful appeal to her, and Lady Gwynne, of the Orchard House, at Warmouth, is no more like the reckless, self-sacrificing creature, whose heart was melted into water by the touching voices of the choir boys at Felton, than a feeble, wailing infant is to a sturdy child. She has passed through the furnace of affliction, and come thence purified seven times in the fire.

And with her strength has arisen a vast pity, a tender compassion for the weaknesses of others; and especially for those of Auberon Slade. For she knows that he is not a religious man; that he is

utterly unmindful of the sources from which she has drawn her consolation; and she has longed (how often since they parted she could not say) that it were her lot to impart to him some of the spiritual comfort which has been so mercifully vouchsafed to herself.

And now, perhaps, this great privilege will be placed within her power; it will be given to her unworthy hands (which have robbed him of so much) to requite him in some degree for the disappointment of the past; to return into his bosom full measure, pressed down and running over.

Oh! if it were but God's will that it should be so!

Yet with all these useful holy resolutions passing through her mind, Lady Gwynne is not quite sure of the advisability—the wisdom—even of the virtue of her resolve,

as is evidenced by the very timid and conscious manner in which she introduces the subject in her next letter to Mr. Lawrence. She would not keep it from him for the world (even if she could do so), for ever since their separation she has been used to write and consult him on all her little difficulties, temporal and spiritual; but she is rather uncertain in what mind he will receive her present news; for though the name of Auberon Slade has never passed her lips or his, they know equally well who has been the destroyer of her peace of mind.

"Do you remember Fernside?" she inquires in a postscript, after she has filled two sheets of note-paper with accounts of Daisy's health; the pony's puffy leg; and a mysterious robbery which has been committed on her hen-roost; "a very pretty

place, which was occupied by General Clifford when you were here in the summer? It is let again on a lease of three years, and to that Mr. Slade who came down to Felton Hall for the shooting last season; and whose marriage you may have chanced since to read in the papers. I was astonished when I heard it. I had not the slightest idea they intended to settle in the country, and I think it is very likely they will be disappointed with so quiet a place as Warmouth, and think it dull. Oh! why are you not here instead of at Felton? I do miss you so much! Mr. Barnes is very good and kind, but frightfully strict in all his notions of religion, and his conversations rather depress than cheer me. You know what a bad creature I am, and how much encouragement I require in order to make me persevere in doing right; and I miss the cheerfulness with which you used to look on the bright side of everything, and laugh away my stupid fears."

So she writes, and guesses by the answer what her friend's thoughts are, although he says but little on the subject.

"I was grieved to read your postscript, and wish, with you, that we were nearer to each other. You will need to be more than usually cautious in your behaviour; and I shall not forget to ask Heaven to grant you all the strength that you require."

No more than this; but his correspondent takes the words for all they are intended to convey; and he knows that she will understand them.

A month passes,—a glorious summer month, during which they alternately revel in salt water and hayfields (a combination of pleasures not often obtainable in this country), and live on strawberries and clotted cream; and Lady Gwynne hears nothing more of the irruption upon Fernside, although preparations for the reception of the new tenant are being vigorously carried on the while.

And then comes a note from Auberon Slade—short and formal, though capable, by its mere appearance, of making her heart beat more rapidly,—to announce their intended advent; after which, vans of furniture pass through the village; and upholsterers' men from London are lodged at the sign of the "Coach and Horses," and Reuben informs his mistress that the "strange gentlefolk" have entered on possession of Fernside, and brought "a mort of servants" with them.

She knows then that her time is come, and it will be expected of her to call on the Vol. III.

bride; yet she puts off the ordeal from day to day, upon the plea that they must be in terrible confusion, and not in a condition to receive visitors. Until one evening, on returning from her stroll, she finds his card upon the hall table; and feels that, without impoliteness, she cannot longer excuse herself from making the acquaintance of his wife. But, on the following afternoon, as she is ready robed for the occasion, and only waiting for her pony carriage to come round, another card is put into her hand, on which she reads the name of Major Calvert.

Lady Gwynne flies down to the drawingroom to receive him; for, notwithstanding a trifling coldness on his part, and timidity on hers, which rose up between them, after she contracted so intimate a friendship with Auberon Slade, Major Calvert is a great favourite amongst her acquaintance; and the welcome she now extends to him,—tears standing in her grey eyes from excitement the while,—is as hearty as any he received at Felton Hall.

"I am so glad to see you again. It is such a treat to meet a well-known face down here. And I had almost begun to fear that all my old friends had forgotten me."

The Major, who is a handsome, fine-looking fellow of about forty, appears as delighted at the *rencontre* as herself.

"It will be a long time before I do that, Lady Gwynne; or forget the kindness either which you have so often shown me. But I was afraid to—that is, I was not quite certain whether I might—intrude myself upon your notice earlier."

- "My dear friend! you should have known me better. It could never have given me anything but pleasure to meet you again. But where are you staying? —not here?"
- "No! I rode over from Leymouth, where my mother and sisters have a house for the season. But I should have come to see you anyway, as soon as I had ascertained I should be welcome."
- "How good of you!—But what have you done with your horse?"
 - "I left him at the inn."
- "What a shame! underrating my possessions in that way; as if I hadn't stables. But you have not dined; you will stay and have some cold meat at our early tea,—we are horribly primitive here."
- "I should have been delighted, but I promised my mother to be back at seven."

"Oh, that is a nuisance! because we have just finished dinner, and it will be so inhospitable to send you back without breaking bread together."

"Another time, Lady Gwynne, perhaps. I have broken your bread often enough, I think, to free you from the suspicion of inhospitality. All I want now is your society, if you will spare it me."

Here she recalls her mission, and is perplexed. Major Calvert sees it by the expression of her countenance.

"But you were going out. I am detaining you, perhaps."

"I was going out, to make a call; but I am not sure that it is absolutely necessary. By the way, Major Calvert, who do you imagine I was going to call on?"

[&]quot;How can I tell?"

- "They are old friends of yours,—at least one of them is."
 - "I have so many old friends."
 - "The Auberon Slades."

She gives the information lightly, in order to disguise her feelings; but Major Calvert appears to have no hesitation in revealing his. The intelligence decidedly displeases him.

"The Auberon Slades! What the dev— (I beg your pardon, Lady Gwynne)—I mean, what on earth can they be doing down here?"

"They have taken a house on the opposite side of the village for three years, and furnished it."

Major Calvert's turquoise-tinted eyes open to their fullest extent.

"Going to live here! Taken up their residence for good! You astonish me."

- "I was quite as much surprised as you are," she answers, but rather consciously, as she plays with the bugle trimming of her dress, "but I expect they will soon be tired of it, and wish themselves back in London."
- "He will,—I don't know about her,—but Slade settled down to a country life; it is incredible! Does he give any motive for the freak?"
- "He told me it was on account of his health."
- "His health, stuff and nonsense! he is as well as I am,—though he dissipated enough whilst he was abroad, this spring, to have broken any constitution but an iron one. You know, Lady Gwynne,—you must excuse my saying so,—that Slade was never a particular favourite of mine; but since his marriage, I have liked him less than ever."

"You were always a little hard on him," she cries eagerly, "and judged too much from appearances. But whatever his faults, I think his friends must forgive them to him now, for, from all I hear, I do not fancy he can have made a very happy marriage."

The lowered voice, unconsciously tender, in which she finishes her sentence, infuriates the Major.

"Well! and if he has not, it is his own look out. No one asked him to marry the girl; he was prompted to do it by his egregious vanity alone."

"His vanity?"

"Yes; and nothing else. She is a good enough little creature, but an awful fool, and so much in love with Slade (though Heaven only knows what she saw to fall in love with) that she had no capability of hiding it. She was at his feet—literally at his feet—

the whole of last season, when he was so taken up with Lady Mary St. Maur; but he had no time to attend to her till he came back from Felton; and then, having nothing better to do, I suppose, and the same process commencing all over again, he gave in, and asked her to marry him. And now he's repenting at leisure; which is the only result he could have anticipated."

"Is she so very fond of him, then?"

"Most frightfully spoony, so I've heard; and you see, Lady Gwynne, Auberon Slade is not the man who can stand that sort of thing. He is so egregiously vain, that he would succumb to any woman who betrayed a liking for him,—and forget her as easily as he succumbs. But that is no reason he should behave badly to the girl who is unfortunate enough to be his wife."

Pleasant opinions to be discussed before

the woman who has adored him—confessed her preference—been succumbed to, and —forgotten!

Yet she listens, and makes no sign, except the ordinary sign of interest.

"Surely he does not ill-treat her."

"There are so many ways in which a man can ill-treat his wife, Lady Gwynne"—
(Ah! she could have told him that!) "I don't suppose Slade beats his, or is even unkind to her; but he is perfectly indifferent, and allows all the world to see it."

"Oh! that is very wrong!"

"It is quite the talk of his club at the present moment. Men can be careless enough, God knows! but it is not every man who will openly inform his friends that he has married, simply from motives of interest and convenience, and that one

woman would have served his turn as well as another."

"It is lowering himself as well as her," she replies, with a burning cheek that glows with shame for him.

"But Auberon Slade is essentially selfish, and always was so; and in this matter, as in all others, has simply consulted his own convenience. But I pity his poor wife."

"Does she feel it?"

"I imagine that she must; I have not seen her since her marriage, but she is a very warm-hearted girl, and a perfect fool with regard to her love for him. I am sure you will like her, Lady Gwynne, if she is not too much charmed by your cleverness and superiority in every way, to show herself in her true colours."

"Oh, Major Calvert, don't pay me any

meaningless compliments. I am past all that sort of thing."

There is so mournful a ring in the tone in which she utters these words, that his heart smites him for what he has said to her, though he believes that he has spoken but the truth.

- "Your pony-chaise has been waiting for you some time," he continues, after a pause. "I must not detain you from your visit any longer."
- "No, no, I shall not go to-day. It is really of no such vital consequence. I can write a note to Mrs. Slade instead, and tell her I have been prevented by the arrival of a friend."
- "Don't mention my name, pray, or I shall never be forgiven; and I suppose I must leave a card there myself some day."
 - "It would be but polite. Come, then,

Major Calvert, if you will not give up your late dinner for our early tea (which I consider very rude of you), let me at least take you round our property (Daisy's property I should say, since the Orchard House belongs to her), and show you what a famous farm-woman I have become. I assure you I am very proud of my chickens, for there has been a regular murrain amongst the poultry this year, and there is scarcely one to be got for love or money. But what should you know about chickens? I daresay you hardly recognise them when they are placed on the mess-table."

"Hardly," he rejoins, laughing, as he stumbles after her out of the drawing-room window, and proceeds on his tour of inspection.

Two things about Lady Gwynne are wonderfully puzzling the honest soldier,

for he cannot reconcile them with each other.

One is, the increased youthfulness of her appearance; the other, the increased look of pain upon her brow. Why should she have seemed older, and yet less full of care at Felton Hall?

What, had he been told, that Heaven, in bidding her bend beneath a fresh burthen, had mercifully removed the old pressure from her life, lest two such weights combined should crush her! And Sir Lyster's death had opportunely relieved her from an hourly aggravation, at the very moment she was called upon to bear the trial of Auberon Slade's unfaith.

The life and liberty restored to her by widowhood, have given back her youth and sense of freedom; but those new lines across her forehead have been indented by the knowledge, that life and liberty have come too late to leave her peace of mind.

Still, let Lady Gwynne be grateful! Her trouble might have been a heavier one, and she well knows it.

The possession of such a husband, and such a lover, at one and the same time, would be too much for the strength of most women.

Yet women in the world have had to bear it.

CHAPTER II.

MRS. AUBERON SLADE.

THE note of apology is sent to Mrs.

Auberon Slade, and the next afternoon sees Lady Gwynne, with downcast looks and loitering steps, walking slowly in the direction of Fernside, to fulfil the promise which it contained.

Her interview with Major Calvert has left her more than usually depressed. She has been perplexed and worried before this to account for the conduct of Auberon Slade; compelled, against her will, to call him fickle, inconstant, and weak of purpose, and forced with many bitter tears to acknowledge that her love and her sympathy have lost their power to chain his wandering fancy; but it has been more regret than blame that her heart has held for him: she has never yet seriously believed him to be unworthy of her regard.

And how is it possible she can bring that heart to credit that she has been but one of many; and that he finds as little difficulty in trifling with the affections of the woman he has made his wife, as he did with hers? For, as to her own pain, it is but what she deserves, and Heaven doubtless designed as part of the curse to follow her transgression, for she has sinned and led him into sin, and it is but just that she should suffer the penalty of wrong; but this lamb, what can she have done to be entitled to so hard a recompense?

Major Calvert's words have presented the bride in a new light to her rival's eyes, which have pictured her as triumphant, scornful, devoted, and indifferent by turns, but never as a woman, already injured by neglect; a fellow-sufferer, with claims upon her pity. And Lady Gwynne's warm heart is already responding to the mute appeal. To a lesser nature, the thought that Auberon Slade is callous to the attractions of his wife's beauty and affection, might afford ignoble pleasure, from the lurking hope that such indifference arises from the impossibility of extinguishing the memory of herself; but Gwendoline Gwynne is far above such petty feelings. She loves him: not her own good, and when he fails she cannot triumph. She hopes against hope that Major Calvert may have been mistaken in the communication that he

made to her (for she knows from experience that men are not always the best friends that each might have behind the other's back), and that Auberon Slade has not so degraded his better nature, and the distinction he can make between right and wrong, as, whatever his thoughts about his wife may be, to let the world guess at, and comment on them.

And yet, how could an honourable man, and a gentleman have known them else? Is it possible the day will ever shine when she shall be unable to think of Auberon Slade himself by those terms? Oh, Heaven! forbid it! As this thought presses on Lady Gwynne's brain, and makes her cheek glow with shame for him, she recognizes for the first time, how true it is that any calamity is better than that we should blush for those we love. Separation, es-

trangement, death—anything is preferable to the fact that we should be unable to lift up our heads, and say: "Whatever my present loss, my blame, my despair, I am still proud to know that I have been beloved."

And should this consolation be taken from her, Gwendoline Gwynne will know that all that has gone before, is little in comparison with it.

"Is there," she is thinking to herself as she enters the carriage-drive of Fernside; "is there any era in our lives when we can confidently say that pain has lost its power over us, and suffering reached its limit? I suppose not—yet there must come a time when Nature will lay down her arms, and fight no more! Oh! for an increase of strength—for greater faith in the happiness that shall be revealed to us! At this

moment I feel as weak as a child in the prospect of all that is before me. I suffer as much as though I had a right to suffer."

The path through which she toils up to the house is beautiful, and at any other time would immediately have attracted her attention: for she walks on turf which is canopied by trees, and fringed with broadleaved ferns, from beneath which every now and then, the innocent wistful face of a little rabbit peeps at her cunningly, and disappears again. Lady Gwynne is essentially fond of nature. Even at Felton Hall, about which she found great difficulty in preserving anything that did not prove useful to Sir Lyster, his horses or his dogs, she had contrived to discover and retain one or two uncultivated little spots, in which to nurse her romantic fancies. And Fernside with its fine old trees, and wild wilderness-like surroundings, is purely a poet's paradise, which, under any other circumstances, would have called forth her warmest admiration. But just now, her mind is too much filled with one idea to have any leisure to observe outward things, the hope that she shall not encounter both Auberon Slade and his wife at the same time, and her desire is gratified; for when she is shewn into the drawing-room she finds it empty.

It is an apartment capable of being made both habitable and pretty, being low and long, and opening with French windows to the flower garden. But as Lady Gwynne first sees it, there is a painful air of discomfort about the whole. The carpet, and curtains, although in good taste, are too new to look like home; and, apparently, no effort has been made, by a judicious arrangement of lace curtains, table-covers or Indian matting, to soften down their vivid colouring. The furniture also seems to have been left just as the upholsterer's men may have placed it—the table in the centre of the room; the chairs against the wall; the piano closed and locked, with an empty Canterbury standing beside it.

Lady Gwynne, remembering the genuine approbation which Auberon Slade's taste used to accord to her drawing-room at Felton, over which books and music, and objets d'art (from every quarter of the globe) were scattered lavishly on a background of purple velvet and ebony, looks round the prim apartment with dismay, and wonders what he can be about, not to give his young wife a kindly hint or two upon the subject. Why is there no ornament upon that sternly polished table except a

huge Bohemian vase, guiltless of flowers; no books, save two photographic albums, a crimson Longfellow, and a green morocco Tennyson; and on the mantel-piece, a clock, so fresh from the maker's hands that its glittering ormolu is almost blinding to look upon; a pair of candelabra, and a horrid likeness of the master of the house, in a magnificent frame, in which he appears very stiff, very uncomfortable, and eminently unlike himself?

How femininely anxious Lady Gwynne becomes to pull the chairs out of their places, and disarrange those odious books, and strew the table with flowers, and the piano with music, and make the room look as if someone sometimes sat in it!

She wonders how Auberon can stand anything so formal and precise. It fidgets her to think how different she could make the place look if she had her will; she gets so excited as almost to forget the nervous agitation with which she entered the apartment. But she is recalled to it by the approach of a light step in the passage, and the sound of a girlish voice, speaking, not very confidently, outside the door, which in a moment more opens, and brings her face to face with Mrs. Auberon Slade.

At least, so she concludes, although the reality so far exceeds her expectations, that Lady Gwynne is almost tempted to enquire if she *has* the honour of addressing the mistress of Fernside.

A figure, too plump perhaps to promise grace in the future, though very taking in the present, with its rosy flush of health and youthful dimples, two little rounded hands extended rather timidly to meet her own, and large, innocent blue eyes looking

up enquiringly in her face; this is all the impression that Lady Gwynne takes in, on a first view of the wife of Auberon Slade.

But, when she has time to examine her more minutely, she perceives that the hair which the treacherous photograph had represented as almost black, is of a reddish brown; that the eyes, wide open, and of too light a hue, are just the sort of eyes that the sun delights in passing over altogether; and that the greatest charm of the whole face, its expression of childish simplicity, is lost when animation ceases, since no look of thought comes to replace the vanished sparkle. So that, in her own mind, Lady Gwynne can perfectly account for the wrong impression given her by Miss Cameron's picture. The young wife, clad in a thin muslin dress, through which, perhaps, her neck and shoulders gleam a trifle

too rosily to please such as think a woman's beauty null without refinement, comes forward shyly, with those clear blue eyes which seem to plead for welcome, fixed anxiously upon her guest.

No look of pride or triumph, even of satisfaction, appears in the gaze which meets that of Gwendoline Gwynne; but a shrinking bashfulness, and hesitation; a humility, which, under any circumstances, would have appealed to her best feelings, and ensured the suppliant a kind reception.

But there is something more; another feeling apparent in the face of Charlotte Slade, that bringing to her visitor's mind the words of Major Calvert, touches her heart more nearly than anything else could have done. And this is the outward sign of untold trouble—the dim violet circles draw about the eyes; the slight depression

at the corners of the pouting mouth; the weary, wistful look that has already settled on the rounded face.

Slight tokens, perhaps, and held of little count by the world, but easily recognised by a fellow sufferer; and as the girl advances to Lady Gwynne, and she reads in her countenance the truth of what she has been told—that, apparently in the possession of all good, the wife of Auberon Slade is yet not happy—a great compassion seizes her-a vehement desire to impart some comfort, to express some sympathy, with one more injured than herself -and, acting on her generous impulse, she seizes the younger woman by the hand, and, drawing her, almost eagerly to her breast, kisses her three or four times upon the forehead.

The bride does not hold back, nor even

shrink from the unexpected embrace; but having received the baptism of friendship, looks up in the sweet, earnest face of her guest for a few moments, wonderingly, almost alarmedly—and then, with a little cry of surprise and pleasure combined, throws herself again into her arms, and begins to whimper.

"My dear Mrs. Slade!—how foolish of me!—I have been too abrupt—will you forgive me?—I should have asked your leave first."

So pleads Lady Gwynne, in broken sentences, for there are tears in her own eyes; but it is some time before the little bride can answer her.

"Oh, no!" swallowing back her tears like a child that is trying not to cry; "it is all my fault, Lady Gwynne! I think it is so very kind of you—but I was afraid to

meet you—and so nervous—and it is different to what I had expected—that's all."

"Afraid to meet me, my dear! but why?

I am a very ordinary person."

"Oh! no! indeed you are not—at least Auberon always says so. He is never tired of talking about you, and telling me how good you are, and clever, and well-read. And at last he made me quite shy of meeting you, for fear—for fear—"

"For fear of what?"

Mrs. Slade hangs her head dejectedly.

"That you should think me so very, very silly in comparison!"

"My dear girl! I certainly shall think so if you talk such nonsense."

"Oh! but I am silly. Auberon says so, and I know it perfectly well. But I never seemed to find it out whilst I was at home!"

"There are very few girls, you must remember, whose minds would not fall in their own estimation when first brought in contact with a man like Mr. Slade. We women have not the same advantages as men. Your husband's knowledge used to make me feel very foolish sometimes, in the days when we were friends together."

She is so eager to console the humbled little heart beside her, that she is forgetting the claims of her own.

"I can hardly believe that, though he is so clever! A great deal to clever for me! And I thought you would be the same, Lady Gwynne, and would never care to have me for a friend; and, indeed, I hardly think so now—only I feel a little lonely here, at first—it is all so strange, you know; and coming away from home, and——"

"I understand it all," was the ready answer, "and can perfectly sympathise in your feelings. It is a dull work entering a new home with no one to help or advise you. But I am an old housekeeper, and if I can be of any use to you, Mrs. Slade, you must not hesitate to let me know."

"How kind you are, how very kind! How foolish of me to have been afraid. But please don't call me 'Mrs. Slade.' There are so few here to say my Christian name."

- "What must I call you?"
- "Lottie; everybody calls me Lottie, and it will make me feel so much as if I had a friend in Warmouth."
- "You have one, my dear girl, you may depend upon that; and now you must tell me when you will come up to the Orchard House, and visit me. I shall expect to see

you there very often; whenever you like, in fact, for I am very much tied to home by attendance on my little girl, of whose accident perhaps you may have heard."

"Oh, yes! Auberon told me. She fell over the balustrades into the hall, and you were not with her. How sad it must have been."

"I was not with her at the moment," replies Lady Gwynne, blushing hotly to remember where she was "at the moment"—"but she had every attention as soon as it could be given; and I thank God it has not turned out so serious as we once anticipated. She is obliged to lie on her back for the present; but we hope to see her walking about again a few years hence, and meanwhile, she is very cheerful and patient, and willing to submit to everything that is thought good for her."

"What a dear little thing! How I vol. III. 4

shall like to go and sit with her sometimes! Lady Gwynne, might I— if it is not asking too much——"

Lady Gwynne waits for a continuation of the sentence.

"Well, my dear!" she says, at last.

"If you wouldn't mind—if it wouldn't be inconvenient, that is to say—might I walk back to the Orchard House with you now?"

Lady Gwynne laughs at the earnestness with which the request is made.

- "Is that all? Of course you may; I shall be delighted to have your company. But are you sure you will not be wanted here?"
- "Oh, yes!" a little sadly. "I am sure not to be missed, and I have not been out all day; because Auberon does not like my going outside the drive gates alone."
 - "He will soon countermand that order

here. Warmouth is such a very quiet place."

"I hope he will, or else how shall I ever go to see you?"

"Of course he will. We will not imagine otherwise for a moment. But now, if you are really going to be so good as to walk back with me, I think it is time we were upon the move."

Mrs. Slade flies out of the room, and in another minute, returns with a lace shawl thrown over her shoulders, and a coquettish little hat set on the summit of her auburn hair.

She links her arm in that of Lady Gwynne, as though she had known her for ten years, for she is one of those creatures who do everything by extremes; and will be as confidently familiar now as she was before unreasonably alarmed.

But Gwendoline Gwynne does not repulse the friendly action—on the contrary, it rather pleases her; for she has taken a fancy to the girl, and feels relieved to find that she can like her, and that a great load is lifted off her breast in consequence. is not the liking begotten of reciprocity of sentiment, or congeniality of disposition, for no two characters could be more dissimilar than hers, and that of Charlotte Slade—she sees that at a glance—it is rather the compassion, Heaven born, for one, weaker, simpler, and in every respect less fitted to contend with the world's troubles than herself; and yet, perhaps, mysteriously gifted with as large a capability of suffering.

She feels towards her, much as she thinks she might feel for Daisy under the same circumstances; as though she could do battle for her, long after she had laid down arms in her own cause. And she marches down the grass grown drive of Fernside, with Mrs. Auberon Slade clinging to her arm, and looking up laughingly in her face, while she tells her tales of her home or continental life; almost proud to think that she has achieved this little victory over her evil passions, and ready to defy Satan, or the world to tempt her to be jealous, or envious, or covetous again.

When, as the women are gaily questioning and answering each other, they come suddenly upon Mr. Auberon Slade.

Ah! how much easier it is to be virtuous when all the occasions of temptation are put out of our way! Lady Gwynne, for the moment, almost regrets that she has permitted her new acquaintance to accompany her home. She would have Auberon Slade

believe her to be everything that is most strong; but she dreads lest he should conceive it possible she could think lightly of their past!

Mrs. Slade, for her part, is first attracted by a sudden halt in her companion's footstep, and then an increased rapidity of motion, and looking up to ascertain the cause, catches sight of her husband's lithe figure as he makes his way to them across the ferns. And then it is her turn to hesitate and blush; but more, as it appears to Lady Gwynne, with timidity, than pleasure.

"Oh, here is Auberon! I wonder what he will say to see me with you? I hope he may not want me to go home with him! But if he does, I ought to, ought I not?"

"Undoubtedly—and any other time will do just as well for the Orchard House. How do you do, Mr. Slade?" in rather a nervous manner. "I suppose you scarcely expected to meet Mrs. Slade and myself together."

He removes his hat, and takes her proffered hand, but without speaking; and when he does so, it is to his wife.

"You were going for a walk?"

"We were just going—that is, Lady Gwynne said I might go with her—but of course I will come back with you if you want me, Auberon," replies Mrs. Slade, who from anxiety and agitation combined has become one huge blush.

"Mrs. Slade would say," interposes Gwendoline Gwynne, in answer to his look of mystified surprise, "that I was about to take her up to the Orchard House, and introduce her to all my belongings, if you have no need of her presence here. She has told me of your objection to her walking alone, but if you will spare her to me for an hour, I promise to send her back safely in my pony-chaise at the end of that time."

- "Only too much honoured," he murmurs, as he switches off the tops of the basket ferns with his light cane; "that is, if you are certain she will not be intruding on your meal time."
- "Oh, I hope I shan't intrude," cries little Mrs. Slade, in a voice of alarm, "because if I shall, Lady Gwynne——"
- "Make yourself easy,"—with a reassuring pressure on her arm—"you will give me pleasure by your company, at whatever time——"
- "And you are certain you don't mind my going, Auberon?"
 - "I have already said so."

"But if you are not quite sure—if you would rather——"

"What do you think of Fernside, Lady Gwynne?" he interposes, without paying any further attention to his wife. She tells him her opinion, which is a very favourable one, and suggests a few easily effected improvements in the garden, and he seizes eagerly on the idea, and makes a note of it. After which, they move on again, he walking slowly by their side, but at the drive gate he stops, and raising his hat, bids the visitor good evening.

As he does so, his wife looks wistfully into his face.

"Oh, Auberon! are you going back? I hoped——that is, I thought, perhaps——"

She means to say (were she not so bashful of uttering an opinion) that she had hoped he would accompany them to

the Orchard House, and at her words he halts, expecting, maybe, that Lady Gwynne will second the half-formed proposal—waiting, certainly, until she shall do so, before he makes his own decision. But no such courteous acquiescence issues from her lips, his presence only makes her feel her weakness more, and she has no desire for his company; so she stands, neutrally silent, with his wife clinging to her arm, and after a moment's brief scrutiny of her unbending features, he bows again, and turns away.

"You—you won't come, Auberon!" says Lottie, in a very disappointed voice.

"No, thank you, Lottie. I have other things to do! Don't forget that dinner is at seven." And turning on his heel, he leaves them, apparently to walk back to the house. But when the two figures have passed through the gates, and tread the

dusty country road together, he creeps back furtively, almost guiltily, and concealing himself behind one of the posterns lest he should be seen, looks after them.

There they go,—so widely different to each other in mind, and person, and acquirements; and yet, in their devoted love, their tenderness, their dependance,—God save the mark !--upon himself, so wonderfully similar. She, the elder, for whom even now, let the world think what it may, he would shed the last drop of his blood, with her graceful upright form, her sombre garments, sweet, sad face, and earnest thrilling eyes: and by her side the girl, who, though ready to lay down her simple life for him, he feels so marvellously indifferent about, with her plump ripe figure, blooming cheeks, wide open orbs, and parted lips—all fluttering robes, and gaily-coloured ribbons.

What a contrast they present to one another!

Auberon Slade gazes after their receding forms for a few moments, almost fiercely, and then as a turn in the road conceals them from his view, he stamps his foot, heaves a deep sigh, and with an oath half uttered, but fully meant, commences to retrace the path which they have trod together.

CHAPTER III.

"LET HIM SPEAK FOR HIMSELF."

THE very partial, and, in some instances, biassed opinions of Sir Lyster Gwynne, Mr. Norris, Major Calvert, and others, on the subject of Auberon Slade's marriage, have been fully discussed in these pages; but the man's own feelings in the matter, his own thoughts, reasons, and ideas, have not even been inquired into, and it is time that he should come forward and tell them for himself.

Gwendoline Gwynne, actuated (good as she is) by an unconscious jealousy, envy,



and deep sense of her own loss, imagines that this marriage with Charlotte Cameron can only have been brought about by one cause—a want of faith towards herself; and that, in consequence, all that Auberon Slade said, and promised to her at Felton Hall must have been false; that he either deceived her or his own heart, and can never have loved her, and desired to pass his whole life by her side and in her service, as he then thought (or at least said) that he did do.

She thinks (with many others of her sex) that men regard marriage in the same light as she does: as a losing and a mixing of themselves, in and with another nature, until the two lives, whilst they exist, can never again be otherwise than identical. And to woman, marriage is (temporarily) such a loss of identity, which is the reason

it so far oftener turns out unfortunately for her than for man; for there are but few creatures in this world, good enough, or strong enough, to guide themselves through its intricate mazes, far less to have another dependent on the twisting of their crooked will.

But with men, marriage is quite a different affair; for they can either direct their wives or let them direct themselves; frequent their company, or leave them to their own devices; pay the hard tithe of attention duty demands, or lavishly bestow their whole affection; and on no one occasion are they called upon, to yield up their own will to another, change their opinions, or alter their course of life, unless they wish to do so. Of course they have their preferences—who has not?—and there are instances on record in which they have

found Memory a very troublesome appendage, and Regret a visitor that will not be shown the door. But what then? We may prefer Louis-Quatorze chairs, covered with red velvet and rich in gilding, whereon to repose our portly forms, but if we cannot procure them, we do not of necessity reject the more unassuming horse-hair.

And Woman is to Man, as a necessary article of furniture; without which his house is not only incomplete, but quite uninhabitable. He must sit down. But it is not so with the weaker animal. Call her spoilt, unreasonable, childish if we may, she will not eat bread and attempt to delude herself into the idea that it is cake; nor live on milk when she has tasted brandy.

Man, deprived of his Louis-Quatorze, devotes, maybe, an occasional sigh to the memory of what "might have been," but reposes pretty contentedly on his horse-hair, nevertheless; but take away her cherished toy from a woman, and she will break anything else you may put into her hands. She is very like a great baby in this respect, it is true; but she knows how to love better than a man; and robbed of her natural rights, prefers to be desolate and alone, living on the dream of delights that were substantial although past, than exchange it for a present sham.

This is truth, but Gwendoline Gwynne does not believe it; and very few women do. She thinks that if Auberon Slade makes any love at all to his wife, it must be exactly in the same manner, and with the same sensations, perhaps rather stronger ones, that he made love to herself; that there is but one way of bestowing a kiss upon a woman, or of looking in her eyes, or

of saying that you adore her, and that since a husband can scarcely omit to pay such attentions to a newly-made wife, she must have been robbed of all her treasures before they could have been bestowed on Charlotte Cameron. But she argues falsely, for she begins with the mistake of supposing that Auberon Slade could not have married unless he had ceased to love her, whereas that very marriage was brought about solely from the excess of his uncontrollable passion for herself. Yet her wounded pride forbade her asking him the question as soon as it arose, and now-it is too late! He loved her—he loves her still—as fondly and truly as he said he did, and no woman will ever have the power to expunge her image from his heart.

When he first went down to Felton Hall his mind was filled with one idea—an ad-

miration of, and desire to gratify himself; in fact, he was intensely selfish.

But, day by day, this self-love had been expurgated by her example: her quiet, willing performance of unwelcome duties—her frank, but friendly counsel to himself. And thus he had grown to love her (Heaven only knew by what means), and found courage to tell her of the truth.

Still, his love was selfish; had it not been so, he would have flown her presence sooner than discovered it; but it did not look so much like love of self, and so he passed it over, as she did.

Oh! the happy, happy days! innocent, compared to those which followed, in which he used to wander with her in the shrubbery at Felton, and draw out all the powers of her mind, and hear her murmur his own poetry, whilst each word fell like living fire

on his heart. Oh! the mad, the guilty moment in which he made up his mind that he could not live without her, and destroyed the peace of hers—for nothing!

Auberon Slade had never been a seriously thinking man; but from the first hour that he poured the story of his guilty passion in the ear of Lady Gwynne, he knew that he was wrong; knew that he was risking her salvation with his own, and that the end of such a love could only be remorse and misery for both of them; and yet he persevered, trusting to her deep devotion to make her forget everything but him.

But when she woke, as from a horrid dream of hell, and bade him leave her—and he went; the full force of what he had contemplated doing, seemed to break upon him all at once, and drive him frantic. He saw her and himself as they might have

been, miserable, despised; for ever lost (in this world, if not the next), and shuddered at the bare idea of what he had believed, but a few hours before, to be not only possible, but the best thing for both of them. And yet he felt the tide of his affection to be so strong, and his desire to possess her so unconquerable, that he believed that if they ever came together again (as in the course of events they probably would come), their destiny could not be averted for the second time.

Unless, indeed, he placed a barrier between them evermore—a barrier which her pride would refuse to leap, though he made little of it—and when that barrier suddenly presented itself, in the shape of Miss Cameron's unmistakable devotion, he fell into the innocent snare at once. Gwendoline was lost to him; it was all very well

to say "wait and hope, and be patient, and have faith in time," but it's "ill work waiting for dead men's shoes," and Sir Lyster, in all probability, would survive himself.

Yes! since he loved her too well to injure her—(and the facts of the case had really assumed this extraordinary transformation in the eyes of Auberon Slade; so ready are we to deceive ourselves)—the only thing that remained to him, was to erase her image from his mind; and he could think of no better method for its accomplishment than by taking another woman to his arms. He supposed that he must marry some day; all men of sense married after a certain age; and a bachelor's house is seldom the most tranquil spot in which to court the Muses; and why should not Charlotte Cameron do as well as anybody else? She had a very fair fortune; was

healthy-or at all events she looked soand devoted to himself. And a man should always marry the woman who loves him. It is the greatest mistake in the world, so Auberon Slade said, to marry the woman whom he loves, for in the game of matrimony, the rules of "give" and "take" are never equal; and there is a French proverb which declares that in love, there is always one who kisses, and one who presents the cheek. And so he proposed, hurriedly, unadvisedly, almost unknowingly, and hoping against all hope, that the marriage ceremony once completed, his broken heart would heal up again, and the whole affair be finished for evermore.

Oh, shortsighted and unreasoning. Why, when puppies are permitted to look about them in nine days, are we unhappy mortals kept blindfold to the end of ours?

It was rather an untoward event, Lady Gwynne coming up to London before the final knot was tied; but matters were too far advanced by that time to be averted, and he tried to brave it out, and to persuade himself that the emotion caused him by her presence, was an additional source of congratulation that he had been brave enough to place an insuperable obstacle between their ever meeting again, except as friends.

Yet he suffered at that period, scarcely less keenly than she did; and what he felt when, on his wedding tour, he received the intelligence of Sir Lyster's sudden death, I shall not attempt to picture,—there is no power in pen and ink to paint such agony!

He remained on the Continent for more than three months, longing, yet dreading, to return to England; and striving to

drown the recollection of the fatal mistake he had made, by those headstrong and foolish means, which his friend, Major Calvert, was maliciously pleased to be able to relate of him. Then the advent of the season (at which he expected to be made as much of as he had been the season previously) allured him home, and he found to , his exceeding chagrin, that Auberon Slade, who had published nothing for a twelve-. month past, and allied himself to a woman, who was neither an heiress, a beauty, nor an aristocrat, was a very different person to Auberon Slade, the rising author of works still fresh in their readers' minds, and the preux-chevalier of Lady Mary St. Maur.

The fashionable world seemed to have forgotten him; he was no longer deluged with three-cornered notes and cards of invitation; few recognitions were accorded him, and no appointments made; even the Muses, fickle-minded females, appeared to have joined the general cabal, for he could neither read nor write,—and sickened and disgusted with the little attention he commanded, he resolved to cut London altogether, and live in the country.

Most authors, who had made any name for themselves, possessed their country residences, to which they could retreat for the purposes of incubation; it was only natural to suppose that one could write better when quiet and undisturbed; and how was it possible that fanciful images of poetry and romance could be invoked amidst the traffic of omnibuses, the cries of street-hawkers, and the mellifluous efforts of the German bands?

And so Auberon Slade plunged into a library of those highly-flavoured works of

fiction, the monthly registers of advertising house agents, and was soon busily employed wasting his strength, his time, and his money, in running half over England, to view places that were as utterly unlike the printed descriptions given of them, as the author of the description was unlike a man of truth!

He had no intention, when he commenced his travels, of finding his way down to Warmouth; on the contrary, it was a mere chance that took him there; but when the notice of Fernside (amongst several houses vacant in Dorset) was put into his hands, and he found that it lay close to the Orchard House, he could not resist the temptation of going down to see it, and have the chance of once more looking into her face, and holding her hand; of guessing, in fact, if Gwendoline Gwynne

had borne the terrible calamity that his haste had brought upon them both, better or worse than he had done himself.

And then,—the place suited him and he took it. He told himself at the time that he could not resist taking it.

It was a weak, a foolish, thing perhaps to do; but it was not a wicked one. The action was like the man. I do not claim for my hero any especial virtues; I am aware that he is weak and foolish, and impetuous, and unpersevering; but, hitherto, from whatever cause, he has not been wicked! Accredit him with all the good you can.

And for all his folly he is suffering a bitter retribution now, let Gwendoline Gwynne believe him to be as heartless as she may. He has settled down at Warmouth with the intention of leading an immaculate

existence. He is going to read, and study, and write, until he has made his name as famous as she used to say he was capable of rendering it; and if he seeks her company, it shall be only for the purpose of benefiting by her clearer judgment of right and wrong; and drawing from her bright example of resignation, fresh strength wherewith to tread his weary way.

Poor Auberon! how much harder you have made your task! What an increase of trouble you have piled upon your already overladen spirit!

The remedy does not seem to work very well at present; he grows so hot and uncomfortable every time he sees a black dress (though it be even the washerwoman's) approaching in the distance, and a ring at the hall bell is apt to disturb

him in his labours and put his choicest ideas to flight, whilst he wonders who the visitor may prove to be. But he attributes this unsettled condition to the sudden change effected in his mode of life, and persuades himself that when he is better used to meet her as of old, he shall feel more at ease in her presence. Only—he is so disappointed when the afternoons slip away one after another, and Lady Gwynne does not appear; and yet, when his wife receives the note to say the hour at which they may expect to see her, he sneaks into the grounds with his cigar, and does not reapproach the house until he imagines she has gone.

Oh, mutability of human nature! Strange, deceptive state that revels in perplexing us? I think one of the most lowering proofs of our corruptible condition is the facility with

which we lie to our own souls—and our own souls believe us!

As Auberon Slade strolls back towards Fernside, he ponders on the interview just past, and the impression it has left upon But his mind (wearied with lingering on wrongs for which there is no remedy at hand), quits the beaten track of old regret, and dwells more on the present. He hardly knows if he is glad or sorry to see that Lady Gwynne has taken a fancy to his wife; it is true that he would have been annoyed had she disliked Lottie; but to make a friend and associate of her, to frequent her company perhaps more than she will his own-it seems so much as if she were taking up weapons for the other The other side! what nonsense he is talking, as if there could be two sides now for Lottie and himself—Gwendoline is the

one that must stand for ever upon the other side of the way!

Heavens! what a sigh was that! it seems as though it gave the air a load to carry off with it, and caused the timid householders of the branching ferns to couch and pant hard, until the producer of such awful sounds had passed their hiding places by. It startles even himself, and his thoughts immediately quit the sublime, and descend to puerilities. He begins to wish she were not swathed in black; he hates the mockery of crape and bombazine; it is all a fudge, a huge humbug, and he wonders Gwendoline is not above succumbing to such a foolish fashion. And with her faintly tinted complexion (it used to be rosier, he thinks at Felton) and serious cast of features, she really looks a mourner, and impresses one with the idea that she regrets

the man's death—ha! ha! or his fortune; or has put herself in black for her own sins—or—or—his! Pshaw! he wishes that he had not thought of such a piece of folly! he shall never bear to look upon her funereal robes again!

"Oh, Gwendoline! beloved, adored, and unforgotten! Would God that you had died in one of those dear moments when your head lay on my heart, and your heart believed me true!"

Could that unuttered cry have reached her where she stood, what joy—what rapture—what despair—would have filled her patient soul by turns!

CHAPTER IV.

A BRAVE RESOLVE.

MEANWHILE, Lady Gwynne and her young companion have quitted the dust-whitened road, and turned into the green fields which lead by a pleasanter, though more lengthy way to the Orchard House, and the tongue of Mrs. Auberon Slade, unloosed by the removal of her fear, is running glibly (an unprejudiced hearer might add, idiotically) on every topic which happens to enter the empty little receptacle which was prepared by Nature for the brain which never took possession there.

But Lady Gwynne, in her generous determination to make the best of Auberon's wife, passes over the foolishness, and only dwells upon the freshness of her conversation—a freshness which seems to impart new vigour to her own faded spirit.

For it is for the first time. She is not yet tired of hearing the same remarks made over and over again, nor had the opportunity to observe that having once enjoyed the pleasure of Mrs. Auberon Slade's society one must either forego the delights of conversation altogether, or submit to tread old ground until footsore. The girl prattles of Fernside; of her father's house; of her own likes and dislikes, in a schoolgirlish and uncertain manner; touching lightly on each subject as it comes beneath her notice, and never betraying by word or sign that her feelings have dived beneath

the surface of any. Yet her new friend encourages her to talk, and especially as she shows no inclination to introduce the mention of her husband's name. Everything is giggled over by Mrs. Auberon Slade in turn, except her love for him; and even her thoughtless little soul grows serious as it contemplates that sacred topic, and pauses as though it stood on holy ground.

Her character for courage and strength of mind rather deteriorates in the eyes of Lady Gwynne, when she finds that she cannot pass a group of mild-eyed, milky mothers, browsing quietly beneath the spreading trees, and never even lifting their heads to survey the intruders on their domain, without giving vent to little shrieks of comic terror, and making momentary spasmodic clutches at the arm she clings

to, until the awful animals are out of sight; nor conceal the renewal of her fear, when the two silky setters, with loving hazel glances, come crouching to their mistress's feet, not even daring in their timid joy to leap upon her until she shall have given them encouragement to do so.

"But then," as she charitably argues, "Mrs. Slade is but a girl after all; only eighteen years last birthday; so much younger than myself; what can one expect from such a child? It would be almost as reasonable to demand that Daisy should never do, or say anything to grate upon a mind of larger growth and wider experience!"

Of course Mrs. Auberon Slade falls into raptures over everything that is shown her at the Orchard House. People of her calibre always do. The garden, the greenhouse, the dairy, the stable, and the pigsty; each

one is more perfect than the other, and delights her better; and as for Daisy, and her donkey, and her family of kittens—no words can express the pity she feels for, and the interest she takes in, that "poor dear child" and everything that concerns her!

But Miss Gwynne, strange to say, does not seem to return the feeling; and notwithstanding all her affection for her "dear Auberon" and the strong desire she has expressed to see his wife, looks suspiciously at her new acquaintance, and seldom answers, except to rebuff her.

Lady Gwynne views this sudden alteration in her child's demeanour with pain, and tries to correct, or cover it, by gentle interpositions of her own; but Mrs. Auberon Slade does not appear to observe that there is anything amiss; and continues her

string of compliments and condolences without intermission.

"What a charming child! What a beautiful complexion she has, and such a sweet expression. Auberon has so often told me about her! And such golden hair! Oh! you must let me kiss you again, Daisy. But she certainly does not resemble you in the face, Lady Gwynne."

"No! She has never been considered to do so."

"She is much more like her poor papa; he was such a fine-looking man. But I beg your pardon—perhaps I should not have mentioned his name—it was all so sad, so sudden—"

"Mentioning it, will not make it more so, my dear," returns her hostess, with a melancholy smile.

"Ah! well, no!-perhaps not-but on

the day of our wedding and all, you see—it seemed so dreadful! And I thought it was a shocking bad omen. I told Auberon so."

"Oh! you must not think that—omens are all nonsense," replies Lady Gwynne, though she has not much faith in her own words.

"Do you think so? Auberon says he knows of some that have come true!—and I know he thought it a bad thing for us; for he was so terribly cut up about it. For three days I hardly saw anything of him; and once when I went into his room without knocking, he—"

"Oh! stop, Mrs. Slade—stop!" cries Lady Gwynne, suddenly—and then, after a little pause, she adds—"do not let us speak of it any more!"

And Miss Ward, who is always indig

nant at the appearance of any slight (supposed or otherwise) cast on her employer, says with anything but a friendly glance towards the offender, that she only wishes she had had the courage to put her veto on such a subject being introduced amongst them at all.

"No, indeed, Miss Ward! it is no one's fault but my own," replies Lady Gwynne; and then, with a sweet look towards Mrs. Slade, she continues: "You must not mind me, dear; I am all right again; only old memories are sometimes too much for me. Well, Daisy, my child, are you ready to go back into the house?"

"No, mamma; I shall not go back till you do," decides Miss Daisy, with an air of great protection.

"Oh, can you wheel about her carriage just as you like, indoors or out?" exclaims.

Mrs. Slade, quite unabashed by the general confusion she has caused. "How very convenient; I never saw such a good contrivance before. Let me wheel you, Daisy,—right round the garden, shall I?"

"No, thank you, Mrs. Slade; I have Jack to wheel me; I require no one else."

"Mrs. Slade would soon repent of her kind intentions, Daisy, wouldn't she? when she found how heavy you are," says her mother, cheerfully.

"Oh, I shouldn't think she was heavy; not a bit too heavy for me;—let me try." And, without further permission, Mrs. Slade seizes the handles of the carriage in her hand; but a fretful cry from the invalid detains her.

"No, thank you; I don't want it! I said I didn't want it. Mamma, I wish to stay by you."

Mrs. Auberon Slade drops the handle and laughs,—"Why, what are you afraid of—that I shall run away with you? But it is not a bit too much for me, Lady Gwynne; I shall often come up and give her a trundle. She must be lighter than she looks. How very tall she is for her age."

- "I shall be as tall as mamma," replies Daisy, proudly. "I should hate to be short."
- "Hush, Daisy," interposes Lady Gwynne, who is a head taller than her guest.
- "So I should, mamma! I can't bear stumpy women; and no more can Auberon,—he always said so."
- "Mrs. Slade, I have not yet shown you my bed of *immortelles*," exclaims Lady Gwynne, rising quickly from her seat, and drawing her guest after her to the kitchen garden. "They are in their greatest

beauty now; in another week they must be all gathered and stored away for Christmas."

They stand looking on the glorious array of violet and crimson and orange stars, together.

"They're lovely!" says Mrs. Auberon Slade. "I never saw such big ones in my life before. And you decorate the church with them at Christmas! How good of you to take so much trouble. Oh, I think it's so nice to be High Church! I'm very High Church myself.—You see I always wear a cross. Papa doesn't approve of it; he considers it Popish; but, as I tell him, what difference can it make when it's all exactly the same thing?"

"Do you think so?" replies Gwendoline Gwynne, thoughtfully, as she gazes on her immortelles, and muses on the unfading

crowns reserved for those who are faithful and labour to the end.

"Well, I mean, excepting of course the music and the flowers, and the incense, and all that. And I think it is a great shame that people should quarrel about it in the way they do; for there can't be any harm in having the service made a little more cheerful for us,—it's so very long; isn't it? Only I always manage to slip out after the sermon, for, whatever they may say, I can't see any good in stopping to see other people take the Sacrament—can you?"

"Yes, I can; but I have scarcely the time to tell you my reasons now," replies Lady Gwynne. Hearing the meaningless nonsense babbled at her side, she has had some thoughts of speaking on the mysteries of our most Holy Faith, but she represses the desire. This is neither the

time nor place to introduce so solemn a discussion.

"I suppose, from what you say," she goes on presently, "that Mr. Slade and you mean to attend Mr. Barnes's church."

"I do, dear Lady Gwynne; of course I shall go to the same church as yourself; but I don't know about Auberon, for he has never been inside a church since we were married."

"Never been to church!" echoes her companion, with a vivid, quick remembrance of how regular he used to be in his attendance there, when she led the way.

"I can assure you he has not; and I was quite ashamed of him sometimes abroad; but my mamma says it is no use bothering about it, for these very clever men, poets and painters, and such-like, are

generally irreligious, and he'll be all right when he gets old."

"God grant it!" rises silently from the other woman's soul, but she says nothing more upon the subject.

Here the sound of carriage wheels upon the drive, warns Mrs. Auberon Slade of the flight of time; and fearful of being late for the dinner-hour, she cannot be persuaded to stay a minute longer; and, after taking a most needlessly affectionate farewell of Lady Gwynne, and pressing several kisses (unresponded to) upon the cheek of Daisy, she leaves the Orchard House to its original repose.

Then Gwendoline has leisure to turn round and ask her little girl what is the meaning of the extraordinary indifference with which she has received all the advances of their new acquaintance.

- "My dear Daisy, I hardly knew you. You have always been so anxious to see Mrs. Auberon Slade, and now when I bring her to the Orchard House, and she evinces every disposition to be very friendly, you positively repulse her. How is that? What would your friend Auberon say to it?"
- "I'm sure I don't know, mamma, but I don't like her; and I never shall like her; and I hope whenever Auberon comes here that he will leave her at home."
- "Oh, Daisy! as if it were likely! But why don't you like her? She is very pretty."
- "I don't think so. Her hair is red, and so are her cheeks,—and she has such goggle eyes."
- "You naughty child! You know you are saying what is not true. And she was very kind to you."

- "I don't like her to be kind. I don't want everybody kissing me."
- "You never seem to mind Mr. Slade doing so."
- "Oh, that's quite a different thing, mamma! Besides she's stupid."

There is no gainsaying this last statement; and for a few moments, silence is maintained between the mother and the child.

Then Lady Gwynne speaks—

"Daisy, darling, supposing all this to be true; still, you see, she and Mr. Slade have come to be our neighbours; and if we wish to please him, we must be kind and friendly with his wife. Do you understand me?"

"But need we kiss her, or call her 'Lottie?' She told me to call her 'Lottie' this evening, when I had only spoken about six words to her."

Her mother smiles. "She is but a girl, Daisy,—only eighteen. You must not expect her to be as wise as old Mrs. Dawson, or old Lady Gwynne, though she is a married woman."

"Oh, mamma! you are not old: you are quite young and beautiful; Miss Ward often says so; and much cleverer than Mrs. Slade. Why did Auberon choose a stupid wife, mamma; he, who is so clever himself? How will she be able to write or read with him, as you used to do, or put all the commas and full stops into his manuscript? Do you remember how you used to do that for him at Felton, mamma?"

"Yes,—yes, child! Oh, he will teach her how to do it all, in time. But our tea is ready, Daisy; so we will leave discussing Mrs. Slade for the present, and think a little of ourselves. Why, who made this delicious-looking cake? Miss Ward? You will wear out your fingers in our service, Miss Ward, if I do not take better care of you." And then she pushes all her own worries into the background, and makes the evening meal as cheerful as she usually does, for her little daughter and her friend.

But when Daisy has retired to bed, Lady Gwynne strolls down the garden by herself, thinking of the conversation that has passed between them. It seems hard to her (who has so generously taken up the cudgels in defence of her rival) that everyone should turn against poor Charlotte Slade; even down to Daisy, who, childlike, is usually so innocently undiscriminating in the selection of her friends; and Miss Ward, whose dislike, though naturally unexpressed, is very evident.

What has the girl done—so she hotly.

interrogates herself—that all the world, including her own husband, who has sworn to cherish and protect, should be against her?

She married him, it is true, but there lies her worst crime; which, after all, is his; and it is a shame, that with all her youth and beauty, and apparently obliging disposition, she should find it so hard to make her way. But in this instance, Gwendoline Gwynne permits her Quixotic notions of what is due from her, as a Christian towards her innocent opponent, to outstrip her better judgment.

Charlotte Slade finds, and will find, a difficulty as she goes through life, in making friends; not from what she has or has not, but simply from what she is, which is discernible enough to most eyes (even to those of a child), and would be so to Lady

Gwynne's were they not blinded by her womanly compassion for another's wrongs, and her holy desire to conceal a rival's failings. She is dull by nature, and frivolous from education; jealous and suspicious, and, where her suspicions are aroused, low minded; pleasant in temper when all around goes right, but sullen and difficult to appease when once annoyed. Yet, to set against these disagreeable traits in her character, Charlotte Slade is fresh, fair, enthusiastic in temperament, and generally too well satisfied with her own acts and condition, to have any disposition to give way to temper.

And the cordiality with which she has met the advances of Lady Gwynne (of whom, before encountering, she entertained an undefined jealousy, founded on, she scarcely knew what) is due to the fact that, having a strong notion that there are cleverer people in the world than herself, and that the baronet's widow is one of them, she rejoices to find she is not considered unworthy of being admitted to her intimacy.

Added to which, in her girlish, spaniel-like fashion, she really loves Auberon Slade; looks up to, and reverences him as a fault-less creature, infinitely superior to herself; and thinks that it will raise her in his estimation if he sees that Lady Gwynne (whose intellect he appears to rate so highly) makes much of the society she half begins to suspect he despises on his own account.

It is some months ago since Lady Gwynne gave it forth as her opinion in the drawing-room at Felton Hall, that one might always judge of a woman's breeding from her hand,

and temper from her mouth. Where is her judgment flown to now, that she forgets to criticise the rosy hands of Charlotte Slade, which, although small and dimpled bear upon their untapering fingers and illshaped nails, the certain impress of plebeian blood; or overlooks the coarseness of her jaw, which is the worst feature in her face, although at present the plumpness of her youthful cheeks and chin somewhat conceals the defect, which will yet be sufficiently apparent when a few years more have passed over her? Is the head of Gwendoline Gwynne quite turned in favour of this new acquaintance, that she will not see her faults herself, nor permit another to do so without blame?

No, she is as clear of sight, as able of judgment, as discriminating of character as she ever was before; and did she seriously take her sense to task this night, would acknowledge what she knows to be the truth, that Mrs. Auberon Slade in point of mental and physical qualifications, is far below the average of her friends, and quite unfit to be raised to the position of her intimate companion.

But her compassion is so vast, her pity for all that probably lies before this girl so tender, her sense of how awful a destiny it must be for any woman to live with Auberon and not be loved by him, so vivid, that she has no time to criticise.

Charlotte may be—doubtless is—foolish, ignorant, and uninteresting upon close inspection, but that only proves the likelihood of her suspicion, that her husband is already sick of her. And if she cares for him (as Major Calvert says she does, and her own manner seems to corroborate), had

her rival been spitefully and vindictively and revengefully disposed, could she have desired the poor girl a more miserable prospect than stretches out before her?

Auberon, so impatient of stupidity, so intolerant of ignorance, so full of false shame; if his sensibilities are often wounded, how soon he will retort on the unfortunate offender, and make her feel tenfold what she has inflicted on himself. And Gwendoline Gwynne fancies them dragging out the weary time together, the wife growing less pretty, less capable, and more distrustful of herself with each succeeding year; and the husband wearier, less hopeful, and more cold, until her kind eyes, that have almost ceased to weep for their own troubles, fill and run over at the picture she has drawn of her friends' probable disappointment. And with that a grand idea, a

glorious hope, takes possession of her mind, which seizes on and hugs it eagerly, and turns it round in every position, until even to her sober judgment it seems feasible. She thanked God but a few weeks ago that the last link was not yet severed between Auberon Slade's life, and her own; that it was still left to her, honourably and innoently, to mix some small portion of comfort in his daily cup; to make up, perhaps, for much that he might miss in his new home, and to remain, in some measure, the friend, and counsellor, and companion she had been before. And now she thanks Him over again, and for the same cause, though she no longer contemplates bringing it about by the same means. She will be Auberon's friend and comforter; but not by supplying what his wife lacks, excepting through herself. She knows that she is quick, and clever, and strong-minded, above the generality of women—he has often told her so—why should she not impart some of her strength and capability to Charlotte Slade; at all events, in that knowledge respecting literature, and manners, and society, which she evidently lacks, until, by her example and encouragement, she has rendered her what Auberon's wife should be—refined, and elegant, and fit to take the management of his domestic household?

Surely it cannot prove so very difficult! She is so young and impressionable, and has evidently taken such a fancy to herself; it will not be hard to lead her gently on from one thing to another, until she develops into an educated woman. Of course she will not alarm her by any disclosure of her plan, but by encouraging her intimacy at the Orchard House, by drawing out her

opinions, giving a mild hint respecting that habit, or coaxing her to alter this, will by degrees accomplish the desired end, and reap her reward in Auberon's satisfaction.

And then, perhaps, at some future time, not counted by weeks or months, but years and years hence, when both her hair and that of Auberon shall be grey, and she shall have been listening to his praises of his good, true wife, she may confide her little secret in his ear, and hear him thank And if, while she thinks of this, and portrays the perfect serenity with which, by that time, her lover will probably receive the intelligence of the efforts she has made on his behalf, the tears well freshly to her eyes, they do not rise there so much from regret for him, as that so beautiful a thing as Love should ever die! And she brushes them away so quickly, that not a trace remains upon her eyelids to tell they rested there.

The boundary of her flower-garden (as has been said before) is a low wall which separates it from the little church; and inside this wall, fronted by shrubs, runs a turf terrace, which elevates its traverser far above it, and is a very pleasant path to saunter on and catch the sea-air, blowing straight across the cliffs.

Lady Gwynne's heart has been beating fast beneath the excitement of her new idea, and her cheeks are hot and burning, and as she reaches the grassy terrace, she steps on it, and stands upright with the breeze curling through her fair soft hair and about her heated face. It is ten o'clock at night, but the harvest moon is shining brightly, and every surrounding object is distinctly visible, and the sudden

apparition of Lady Gwynne as she springs upon the terrace pathway, startles a man who, with a cigar in his mouth, has been leaning against the walls of the church, and apparently contemplating the windows of the Orchard House.

Lady Gwynne sees the figure plainly, but she is not frightened; for in the first place, she is not one of those delicate creatures who descry a robber in every bush; and in the second, has too much confidence in the well-known proximity of old Reuben and her dogs, to believe that anyone in Warmouth would presume to think it possible to gain an entrance to the Orchard House.

But it may be a vagrant in want of shelter, or a young prodigal unable to procure it, and she does not like to leave him without inquiring his need. "What do you want?" she asks. "This ground is private property."

"I beg your pardon, Lady Gwynne! I trust I am not intruding," says a familiar voice; and Auberon Slade comes out of the shadow of the church walls, and stands bareheaded before her. She is so taken aback by the suddenness of his appearance, that for the first moment she cannot answer him.

"Mr. Slade! What are you doing here?" she says at length.

"Committing a trespass, I suppose, though I had no idea of it! I thought the ground on which the church stands was free."

"Oh! so it is—of course—pray don't think twice of what I said! I imagined I was speaking to a vagrant, and they do break the shrubs and flowers so recklessly. What a lovely night!"

- "Beautiful! I was strolling out with my cigar; and somehow I got into the fields, and found myself up here. You get such a splendid breeze on the top of this hill! But I had no idea I should startle the mistress of the property in this reckless manner."
 - "You did not startle me."
- "Do you carry revolvers with you, when you stroll about at night in this warlike way alone? I must be more careful if you do."
- "You need have no fears on that account," she replies, half laughing in spite of herself.
- "I suppose you think a bullet through my wretched carcase would make but small difference to my happiness—and you are about right. Ah me!" and he sighs heavily as he knocks off the end of his cigar against the heel of his boot. But to this remark there is no answer.

- "Does my smoke annoy you?" he says presently.
- "Not at all! And especially as I am just going in. Good night!"
- "Why do you go so soon? It is quite early; and I wanted so much to thank you for your kindness to my wife to-day!"
 - "It is nothing-pray don't mention it."
 - "But it is everything—to me!"
- "Oh! I like her; no one could help liking her. I think she is a charming girl. I shall be very pleased to have her for a friend."

She says this, rather more hurriedly and nervously, than she would have done, if she had had time to think about it; but he has come upon her too suddenly, and she wants to get away. She feels that she is not playing her part well.

He sighs again heavily and makes no vol. III. 8

reply, which increases the awkwardness of the situation.

"I really must go, Mr. Slade. I cannot stay a moment longer. Good night!"

And before he has time to remonstrate a second time, she has disappeared, and left him to himself.

But why is he there at all? Why should he leave the grounds of Fernside, from which he can have easy access to the seashore, to wander half a mile along the dusty road, and up the toilsome hill which leads to her abode, for the flimsy object of catching the salt breeze.

This is the question which disturbs the brain of Gwendoline Gwynne, as she returns to her own home; and which is not settled long after she enters it.

And then those sighs. How she wishes that he would not sigh so deeply!

What creatures of circumstance we are! Somehow, as she prepares herself for rest that night, the idea of moulding, and training the character of Charlotte Slade, until she shall have made it lovely in her husband's eyes, and worthy to eclipse the remembrance of her own, does not appear quite so delightful a prospect to my heroine as it had done before.

CHAPTER V.

PUT INTO PRACTICE.

BUT the evening doubt is not permitted to bias the morning resolution, for the evil spirit seldom gains ascendancy in the heart of Gwendoline Gwynne for long; she prays too often, and too fervently.

She rises with the firm determination to put her brave resolve in practice, and less disposed to sympathise with, than to blame Auberon Slade for leaving his own home, which he might make so pleasant if he chose, to wander about the grounds of other people.

"So foolish!" she says, frowningly, to herself; "and so unnecessary! As if one part of a place, were not as good as another to smoke a cigar in, and the air the same all over Warmouth. And what can that poor child think of his leaving her alone, in that bearish manner, to spend the evenings by herself? It is heartless of him."

So virtuously indignant is Lady Gwynne over the unfortunate bridegroom's criminal indulgence in a solitary stroll by moonlight, that one would imagine she were the most exigéante of women, herself. And yet, she would have made this man, the most patient, indulgent, self-sacrificing of wives, seeing his faults only through her desire to amend them, and loving him

steadfastly in spite of them all. But to judge him as her husband, and the husband of Charlotte Cameron, are two very different judgments in the eyes of Lady Gwynne. And so, by the morning's light, he stands condemned.

She keeps wondering, as she flits between the dairy and the kitchen (for she is a woman who can accommodate herself to any circumstances, and having settled down to a quiet country life, is charmed to have a finger in every domestic pie), whether she shall be able to induce Mrs. Auberon Slade to spend a morning occasionally with her, and to take an interest in the details of her household management, which, for the sake of the good she can do with her money, she conducts as economically as possible.

That would be a beginning, at all

events, and might lead to grand conclusions. For keeping house, if one's heart is in it, is, after all, as pleasant a business as any other, and by no means to be despised, as beneath the notice of an intellectual mind, for this plain reason, that no fool can do it well. Men are apt to imagine that any woman can keep house for them; they are also very apt to live to be undeceived.

But Gwendoline Gwynne has quite made up her mind on one point, that, in pursuance of the object which she has in view, she must seize every opportunity of mixing in the society of Mrs. Slade, and of gaining her entire confidence.

She is quite sure of this—and yet, when during the course of the morning, a note in Charlotte's very irregular and ill-formed writing, is put into her hand,

and she finds it is a cordial request that she will dine at Fernside on the following day, her immediate impulse is to decline the invitation. To sit at Auberon's table -as Auberon's guest-with his wife doing the honours of the house to her—oh! the idea is odious: she cannot entertain it for a moment. It is an ordeal she could not consent to undergo. She remembers, with a sharp stinging pain, how, in the bygone Felton days, Auberon Slade used to love to tease her, by prophecies of the grand marriage he was to make at some future time, and fanciful descriptions of the mansion in which he should receive her as a guest, and the beautiful and accomplished woman who would preside at the head of his dinner table.

Until, he caused a burning flush of vexation to surmount her cheek, and

bright tears to fill her eyes; and had to swear a thousand times over, that, if he went down single to his grave, no woman, nor money, should ever tempt him to forget the love she bore him; before she could feel satisfied, or even calm again.

And she had declared, on one of those occasions, with all the old impetuosity of that changeable disposition which had rendered her so loveable, and charming in his eyes, that if he ever forgot the promises he had made to her, she would never cross his threshold, nor stoop to be entertained by any woman, however beautiful or accomplished, who filled the position of his wife.

She remembers all this now—the time, the place, the situation—too vividly for her present peace of mind, and decides that she cannot dine at Fernside, and she has a

dozen feasible excuses for not doing so. So she sits down hurriedly, and transcribes the answer, in which she pleads her inability to accept Mrs. Slade's kind invitation, on the various scores of delicate health, of never dining out, nor giving dinners at home: and of the constant attention needed by her little girl; and then dispatches the note, and returns to her occupation, a little flushed, perhaps, from the excitement of recalling old times, and arguing against her inclinations, and not quite certain whether she may not have thrown cold water on the new-born friendship she is so desirous to cultivate.

But she has scarcely risen from her midday meal, when she is informed that Mrs. Auberon Slade is waiting to see her in the drawing-room; and the reception she encounters from her on entering, is proof sufficient, without words, that no offence has been given, or received by the resolution of the morning.

Charlotte casts herself into her new friend's arms, as though she had not met her for a twelvemonth.

"Dearest Lady Gwynne, you must come to-morrow; we can take no refusal; and I have toiled through the sun all this way on purpose to tell you so."

"My dear girl! it is very good of you; but you must excuse me. I never go out anywhere; I am not even in the possession of an evening dress."

"But we shall be quite alone, Auberon and myself. We know no one but you to ask; and it is so stupid there sometimes, you can't think!"

"I am afraid I should not render your evening a very lively one; and I

never leave Daisy, except for a walk, or drive."

- "She has Miss Ward with her; and you can come home as early as you like."
- "I wish you wouldn't press me, Lottie; you make it so hard to refuse."
- "But why need you refuse, when I want you to come so much? It will be so nice to spend a long evening together. And I want to consult you about so many things in the house."

She hesitates. Here is the very opening she has determined to seek after, placed in her hand! Will she be justified, in consideration of her own inclinations, her own feelings, her own false shame, to refuse to embrace it? Will this be putting into practice her resolve to bear all things, and brave all things, in order to render Auberon's wife a more suitable companion

for himself? What is it that rises up to prevent her acceptance of this invitation,— is it charity, patience, pardon, or is it pride? She asks the question in good faith, and her conscience answers for her.

"Well, then, my dear!"—yet even now a little hesitatingly—"if you really desire it so much, I will come; but only on this condition,—that the invitation is not to be repeated. I used to be very fond of society, Lottie, and parties, and every amusement of that sort, but I am getting past them now, and like best to see my friends at home. You can come to the Orchard House whenever you feel inclined to do so,—either morning or evening,—I shall always be happy, and pleased to see you; but you must not ask me to dine out, or mix in any gaiety of that kind again, or my other neighbours will expect me to do

the same; and then I shall be giving them offence."

"Oh, no, dear Lady Gwynne! of course not; you shall do just as you like, only I wish that you could dine with us every day. It is so good of you to come, and Auberon will be so delighted; and I hope you will bring some music, I want so much to hear you sing, and—oh! is that Daisy just come out upon the lawn? I must run and give the dear child a kiss—she is the most charming creature I ever saw."

Lady Gwynne replies that she thinks her little girl is going out for her afternoon ramble to the seashore, accompanied by Miss Ward. And then Mrs. Auberon Slade discovers that it will be the most delightful thing in the world for her to walk back to the village by the side of Daisy's carriage; and she only wishes the dear child

could be persuaded to return with her to Fernside, and bring back a bunch of those yellow roses which Lady Gwynne was admiring so much the other day; which, when Miss Daisy understands for what purpose her company is required, she graciously consents to do; and Lady Gwynne hears Mrs. Slade's voice holding high converse with the child, to the very bottom of the Orchard House lane, when, somewhat to her relief, notwithstanding her high principled resolutions of reform, she finds herself once more alone.

Well, she has what is commonly called "let herself in for it," and so she is too sensible to worry needlessly about the question, but tries to banish it altogether from her mind, until at the appointed hour on the following day, her fat lazy pony

drags her indolently up the drive that leads to Fernside.

She feels rather then, as though she wishes that she had not come, but it is too late for repentance; so, casting her plain bonnet and shawl upon the hall table, she puts a good face upon the matter, and walks boldly into the drawing-room. But she need not have been so bold, for although the time of meeting has fully arrived, there is no one present to receive her; and when, after a few minutes of suspense, the door opens, it is to admit Auberon Slade instead of his wife.

This is what she has dreaded most in accepting the invitation; that bad management, or want of etiquette, will be the cause of throwing her alone with him, the person, of all others, she is anxious to avoid. But Auberon Slade does not look

at all dangerous on the present occasion; on the contrary, he is ruffled, nervous, and unlike himself.

"I am so sorry that you should be kept waiting in this manner," he commences, in a tone of vexation: "but of course Lottie is not ready—she never is."

"It is not of the slightest consequence," replies Lady Gwynne, with a polite smile of reassurance.

"I consider it of all the consequence in the world," he returns, bluntly; "but you might as well speak to the table, as to some women."

"What a very pretty look out, you have here," she says, as she turns to the window with a view to turning the conversation.

"Do you think so?" discontentedly.

"Every one must think so. You are lucky in possessing so much old timber 9 VOL. III.

about the place. It is invaluable, because no money can buy it. I really think you should have a few deer here. They would look so nice amongst those trees."

- "Who is there to look at them?"
- "Why, yourself, of course," with a bad attempt at a laugh, "and your friends. Besides, they would inspire you."
- "Inspire me! I fancy it would take a great deal to inspire me now. My own belief is, that I shall never do anything again."
- "Oh, you mustn't say that," earnestly.
 "Your life is all before you—it is but just beginning; you have plenty of time."
- "Time is of little use, when the stuff is wanting."
- "The stuff, as you call it, will come byand-bye. Wait till you see the autumn glories settle down upon the Warmouth

woods and dells, and you will find inspiration pouring back upon you, quick enough."

- "Hum! Well, we shall see; but for my part, je m'en doute."
- "You are not a fair judge. You have not yet settled down to your new life."
- "No, nor ever shall!" she hears him mutter, just as his wife, radiant in white muslin and red ribbons, rushes into the room.
- "Oh, I am so sorry, dear Lady Gwynne, I am so grieved to be late, but I had quite forgotten to tell my maid what I intended to wear, and everything is at sixes and sevens still, and she could not lay her hands upon my dress. And how are you—quite well?—and dear Daisy? I wanted so much to go up to the Orchard House and inquire after you all to-day, but I had a letter to write to dear mamma, and that

took the best part of the morning, and then Auberon was afraid I might intrude upon your dinner-hour."

"Considering you wished to pay your visit exactly at two o'clock, I certainly was," grumbles Auberon, from the other end of the apartment.

"And home duties should always come first," says Lady Gwynne, who, with an inborn aversion to any public demonstrations of affection, is doing all she can with decency, to detach herself from the clinging embraces of her young friend.

"Here, Lottie!" exclaims Mr. Slade, impatiently, observing the action; "now that you have come down, can't you see about our having dinner? It is already half an hour past the time."

"Oh, yes, dear—of course. I dare say it is ready," meekly answers Mrs. Slade, as

she rings the bell, and asks the question of the servant.

The dinner is ready—has been so from the hour it was first ordered, and is, consequently, more than half spoiled, when a few minutes later they sit down to its dis-Added to which, it is a badly cussion. appointed dinner, betraying want of taste and ignorance of management, in the selection of most of its dishes: and Auberon Slade, who is a perfect epicure on the subject of food, and very fidgety with regard to etiquette, loses his temper more and more, as each succeeding course makes its appearance, and is thoroughly sulky by the time the last one has disappeared. disappointment and ill-humour are so apparent, and Lady Gwynne's efforts to distract attention from them, so unavailing, that poor little Mrs. Slade becomes not only nervous but alarmed; and when at the conclusion of the repast, after an ominous silence of ten or twelve minutes, her husband asks her abruptly, if she intends to remain there all night before she conducts their guest back into the drawingroom, she rises hastily from the table, and finding herself once more alone with Lady Gwynne, bursts into tears of genuine vexation.

"Oh, I am so sorry! he is so awfully angry with me, though I'm sure I don't know what I've done to make him so. Was the dinner so very wrong, Lady Gwynne? I took such pains with it. I thought there would be plenty for everyone."

Lady Gwynne, recalling the boiled leg of mutton that appeared at the top of the table and the roast shoulder at the bottom, flanked by a beefsteak pudding on one side, and a dish of chops upon the other, cannot help smiling at the girl's remark; but it is a smile of genuine kindliness. This is a case in which she can fully sympathise, for she is sure that the young wife has done her best; and thinks the husband's ingratitude but a poor return for all her trouble. And as she takes her in her arms and kisses her, she whispers very comfortable words into her ear.

"And so there was plenty, my dear girl, and everything very good of its kind; but these things want a little management; and a lighter dish or two would have relieved the appearance of the table. However, one cannot be expected to know everything at once; and I daresay you have never been used to order dinner at home."

- "Oh, no! my mamma always does that."
- "Of course; and it is not so easy as people think. I was only sixteen when I married, Lottie, and you would laugh to hear what funny mistakes I made at first."
- "You!" with an upward glance of surprise. "Did you ever make mistakes, Lady Gwynne?"
- "My dear! why should I not? I was still more ignorant than yourself, for I had never known what it was to have a mother."
- "Oh! I wish you would tell Auberon that."
- "But why? It would scarcely interest him."
- "Because he thinks you are so awfully clever, you could never do anything wrong."

There is a touch of jealousy in the tone with which these words are uttered; and

Lady Gwynne's quick ear perceives it, and she answers very gravely:—

"My dear, you are entirely mistaken. No one could know me so long as Mr. Slade has done, without being acquainted with my numerous faults. But I had been a housekeeper for many years before I met him, thanks to the kindness of an old lady, Mrs. Jackson by name, who took me under her maternal wing when I first went to Felton, and taught me all kinds of little things in the way of management, which I never should have found out for myself."

"Ah! there is no Mrs. Jackson here to teach me," exclaims Mrs. Slade, mournfully. "I wish I had never left my dear mamma."

"I will teach you, Lottie," interposes the kind voice of Lady Gwynne; "that is, if you will let me do so. I will show you all I know, and put you up to my little tricks, and make you as good a house-keeper as myself, if you think that will content Mr. Slade."

"You will? Oh! Lady Gwynne, how very kind of you! But I am afraid it will be so much trouble, and you will find me such a stupid one to learn."

"I don't think so; but at all events we will try, and, if you will come up to the Orchard House to-morrow morning, directly after breakfast, we will settle all about the day's dinner together. And I will show you my books, Lottie, and explain to you the method on which I go; and you will soon say, you had no idea it was so easy."

Mrs. Slade dries her eyes, and listens eagerly.

"You see Auberon is always regretting

the French dishes, and how is one to get them here?"

"You have a good cook, and will be able to procure most of them, if you only let her know the names."

"Ah! there's the difficulty"—(with a deep sigh);—"I forget the names, and I never could pronounce them properly."

"Never mind! The next time we are alone together, you shall describe the dishes to me, and I will see if I cannot remember them. We lived on French cookery at Felton. But here comes Mr. Slade; don't let him see your tears; they will annoy him!"

"Oh! I have no handkerchief. I must have dropped it in the dining-room. I will run and fetch another;" and once more she leaves Gwendoline Gwynne standing by herself, at the very moment that she most needs the support of her presence.

Auberon Slade, playing with one of the delicate little cigarettes, which she so well recalls he always used after the dinners at Felton, comes sauntering round by the window, which opens to the ground, and peeps into the empty room.

"What! has Lottie left you to yourself again, Lady Gwynne? I never knew a girl so totally unconscious of the requirements of society. You must let me apologise for her."

"Pray don't take the trouble. Your wife and I get on very well together—we perfectly understand each other. She has only left the room for a moment!"

"You are very good to say so. Perhaps you don't think the dinner needs any excuse to be made for it, either?"

- "I think it was a very good plaindinner. You are too fastidious; you must remember we are not at Mivarts'."
- "No! nor at Buckingham Palace. There are daily reasons against my forgetting either fact."

Then she feels she *must* speak; it is not a pleasant task to have to plead with this man for forbearance towards his wife, but common charity forbids that she should longer hold her tongue.

- "Oh, don't be hard upon her, Mr. Slade. Remember how young, and inexperienced she is. You expect far too much."
- "Is it too much to expect to have decent meals, decently put upon the table?" he answers gloomily.
- "Perhaps not—but it will all come in time. The error lies, in supposing that so

young a girl, fresh from her mother's care, could have the experience of an old house-keeper."

"Her mother might have taught her better."

"But no mothers do so teach their daughters now-a-days; it is a well-known fact, each woman has to earn her own experience. And Mrs. Slade is so teachable, and anxious to do right, that it will not be long before she acquires hers."

"It's all very fine talking," he grumbles on, as he leans against the window post, with his cigarette between his lips, and his soft languid eyes fixed on the evening sky, "but when a man marries, he generally expects to find a little extra comfort at home, in exchange for the horrors of domestic slavery."

He looks so determined not to be

pleased, so ready for one of the reproofs she used to administer at Felton when his naughty fits came on him, that were it not for the sadness which has risen up between them, to check everything like mirth when they are together, she could find it in her heart to administer a good scolding to him now.

"Men are generally very extravagant in their expectations," she answers gently, "and defeat their own ends by being so. Oh, take my advice, Mr. Slade (you know I could only offer it for your happiness), and be more patient with her. She is very much attached to you, and your annoyance wounds her deeply."

"Has it wounded her?"

"Of course it has—she ran away to hide her tears—and after all, you know, she had done her best."

- "Poor little Lottie! well, I suppose she had, but bad's the best; that's all I can say for it."
 - "Then you must teach her better."
- "That's what I'm trying to do, only you don't seem to approve of it."
- "It is not of the action I disapprove; it is of the manner. Take care, lest in securing her greater anxiety respecting your comfort, you do not destroy something which is of far greater value."
 - "And that is-"
 - "Her affection."

He puffs away in silence, and no other remark passes between them, until Lottie has crept back into the room again, and taken up her station in the dusk beside Lady Gwynne.

"Well, Lottie," says the latter, cheerfully, as soon as she perceives her entrance,

"do you feel inclined for a stroll? Shall we go out and help Mr. Slade to finish his cigar?" and as they step into the garden, and he joins them, she is pleased to see him take his wife's hand, and draw it through his arm, and pat it kindly as it lies there, whilst the evidently unusual notice calls up a bright flush of gratitude into the girl's blooming cheeks.

She grows hilarious in her spirits then, as boisterous as she was before depressed, and her triumph is at its culmination, when Lady Gwynne discovers that the evening has slipped away, and it is time for her return, and Auberon proposes that she shall dismiss her pony-chaise, and let them escort her home.

And when they have done so, she sees them turn to leave the Orchard House again, still arm in arm, with Lottie's bright face beaming back upon her, without a sigh—without a regret that it should be so—for the deepest pain that Auberon Slade could now inflict on her, would be the pain of thinking him so utterly unworthy, as to visit his own disappointment on the head of the simple creature he has made his wife.

CHAPTER VI.

THE MUFFIN WORRY.

THERE are people in the world who can laugh one moment and cry the next, love, and unlove, and forget that they have done either, in the course of a few months, and Charlotte Slade is one of these people.

All her emotions are exhibited by extremes, yet, none of them reach much beneath the surface, and it is doubtful whether even her affection for her husband, (the strongest her frivolous heart has ever experienced), would survive the

pressure of poverty, or disgrace, or any serious suspicion.

The result, consequently, of Lady Gwynne's kind intentions on her behalf, and cordial invitation to the Orchard House, becomes very distressing to Lady Gwynne herself, although no outward token betrays it is so. Hers is not a demonstrative nature, especially with her own sex, although she is always kind, and courteous, and forbearing.

She cannot understand the violent friendships entertained by women for each other; nor sympathise with the secret confidences, and the fervent kisses, with which those charming creatures occasionally strive to excite the envy of their male acquaintances. Gwendoline Gwynne has never made, what is termed a "bosomfriend" of any woman in her life, and in

extending the right hand of fellowship, on so short knowledge, to the wife of Auberon Slade, has stepped considerably out of her way.

She has done it for his sake, not for hers, as all the world might see, however much her own heart may deny it; a little, too, in order to satisfy the tender conscience that reproaches her with having thought ill of the girl, before they had met face to face.

She perceives all Lottie's faults most plainly—indeed, they are so 'evident, that no one could avoid perceiving them; and under other circumstances, it is probable that her first meeting with her would have been her last. But Lady Gwynne is undergoing a self-inflicted penance: she knows that her past errors, have been owing to an undue indulgence of her own will, and she

will crush that will, by every means in her power now. The society of Mrs. Auberon Slade is distasteful to her in many ways; for that very reason she will endure it. Her conversation is foolish, and at times sickening; yet she will not only listen, but force herself to respond. Her confidence, with regard to her husband and herself, is, above all others, the greatest trial that Lady Gwynne could be called upon at the present moment to undergo; but still she listens to it, and gives her quiet, womanly advice in answer, and friendly counsel.

And the opportunities for thus purging the self-indulgence of the past, by the self-denial of the present, come on her fast and thick. In giving Mrs, Slade that cordial invitation to come up to the Orchard House whenever she felt so disposed, Gwendoline Gwynne hardly knew, for how much waste

of time she was making herself responsible, for thenceforward, she is there not only every day, but almost all day long. Hardly has breakfast been completed, and Daisy settled on the school-room sofa with Miss Ward and her books, before the voice of Lottie Slade will be heard, loudly demanding admittance at the window, and if refused, which after several wasted mornings, becomes, for the child's sake, imperatively necessary, she walks off in search of Lady Gwynne, and does not quit her side for the remainder of the day. No one wants her at Fernside—so she generally avers, with a sad, drawn mouth that excites the other's pity; Auberon has gone off fishing, or cricketing, or shooting, somewhere in the neighbourhood, and will not be home till dinner-time; and the house is so abominably stupid, and she does not know what

on earth to do with herself. But she never lacks a welcome at the hands of Lady Gwynne. However busy, or oppressed, or sad she may be found, she manages to lay aside the work, or shake off the dulness at the approach of Charlotte Slade, and to be all that she has promised to her—a monitor and friend. She always tries to improve the occasion, by urging Auberon's wife to work, or study, or employment of some kind, but generally without success, for notwithstanding all her complaints over her own shortcomings, and lamentations that she has been taught no better, and that her husband finds fault with everything she does, Mrs. Auberon Slade continues as indolent, as uninformed, and as In vain does bad a manager as before. Lady Gwynne attempt to drill her into habits of method and punctuality, to im-

prove her taste, and to reform her manners. Charlotte cries one moment, and giggles the next, and continues to spell her name with the four letters, FOOL; and it is no less annoying to her friend to find all her efforts thrown away, than to be compelled to spend hour after hour, listening to her puerile and frivolous conversation, and knowing at the close of it, that the girl is as little benefited as herself. Yet, though she frequents the Orchard House only to talk, and not to learn, all hints that its inmates would survive the occasional loss of her society, are thrown away on Charlotte Slade. She has conceived the violent and overpowering fondness of an empty-headed girl, for Lady Gwynne, and neglected by her husband, is never happy out of her presence. thing that she says, or does must now be

regulated by the advice and opinion of this new acquaintance, and she hardly writes a letter, or decides upon the fashion of a dress, without first running up to ask what Lady Gwynne thinks of it.

"My dear Lottie," Gwendoline will say on these occasions, "you really must learn to be guided by your own taste. I shall not always be at your side, remember, to decide whether pink or green will go best with lavender. And I am sure that no one would be better able to direct your mind in these matters, than your husband. I always considered his taste to be very good, and he has a right to have a voice in the ordering of your dress. Why don't you consult him?"

"Oh, dear, Lady Gwynne, I never could! He would only say it was hideous, like the rest of my dresses. He says I have no

taste at all, and perhaps I haven't. But yours is so perfect—do advise me."

"Well, if you will have it so, I say that it should neither be pink nor green. Trim the lavender dress with black, or else with silk of its own shade."

Charlotte looks terribly disappointed.

- "What, all lavender? Won't that be very dull—so Quakerish-like; and I want rather a stylish costume, you know!"
- "Then why not follow your own inclinations? It is of little consequence to anyone but yourself! But when you ask my advice, of course I must give it."
- "Well, now, I wonder which will look best."
- "Why don't you try both, Lottie?" impudently cries Miss Daisy, who has as little respect for Mrs. Auberon Slade, as for one of her kittens.

"Oh! no, dear," replies the other, quite seriously. "That would be too smart. Would mauve look better, do you think, Lady Gwynne?"

"I have already given you my opinion, dear. I have no other."

"Well! it's very provoking. I suppose, after all, I must let my maid decide for me."

The consequence of which decision is, that Mrs. Slade sails up to church on the following Sunday, in a lavender silk dress, profusely decorated with emerald green velvet; and feeling rather disposed to settle herself in her seat, before her friends from the Orchard House come in.

At length Lady Gwynne considers it incumbent on her to extend some sort of invitation to the Slades, in return for that boiled leg of mutton, and beefsteak pudding, on which she was so hospitably entertained at Fernside. She has put off the ordeal as long as she possibly can; for the few interviews she has held with Auberon since his marriage, have so visibly upset the equanimity of both of them, that she dreads proposing anything that may bring about a similar result. Yet she cannot avoid, at some time, asking them to her house; and as Lottie has given her more than one broad hint, lately, that she has a great desire to spend an evening there, she resolves to defer doing so, no longer.

But she will not invite them to dinner; in the first place, because she has done so to none of her neighbours, and, the rule once broken, could no more be strictly adhered to; and, in the second, because she hopes that the idea of an early tea, will so disgust the fastidious taste of the master of

Fernside, that he will permit his wife to come without him. In which opinion, Lottie seems fully to coincide.

"Oh! dear Lady Gwynne! I shall be delighted, of course, if Auberon will only let me come; but, you know what he is; he never touches tea; and I have often heard him say, he would rather go without food at all, than take his dinner early."

"I know that, Lottie. I have heard him say the same myself; and I am sorry that I cannot break through my rule on his account! But he will understand how I am situated. You are not my only neighbours. I have received hospitality from several quarters at Warmouth; but I have never given a late dinner to anyone, nor dined out, until that evening when you persuaded me to go to Fernside. If I do it once, I must do it always! And I am

quite contented with the quiet country life I lead here; and very unwilling to propose anything that shall seem like a desire to mix in society again."

"Oh! of course, dear Lady Gwynne! I quite understand—being a widow, and all that; and so suddenly as it occurred, too! Well, you will not be offended if Auberon does not come, will you, nor think him rude, or negligent, or anything? Because he has a very high opinion of you. I know it quite well—and of anything you may think fit to do; only, he hates tea, and is rather particular about having his cigars; in fact, I don't think he would give up his cigars for anyone in the world—and so—"

"My dear Lottie! I am quite aware of that. You must tell Mr. Slade exactly what I told you; but add from me, that should he change his mind upon the day appointed, or feel disposed to stake his hopes of dinner on a venture, he shall find enough to eat here. I promise that."

She says so—feeling that in mere politeness, she can scarcely promise less—though firmly believing at the time, there is no chance that she will see him.

Mrs. Slade laughs, as though carrying the message were a perfect jest.

"Oh! I will tell him, of course; but you mustn't prepare anything, Lady Gwynne, for he will never come!"

"I shall make no preparations, Lottie, but what are necessary for my other friends, and I shall expect you any way. The day after to-morrow, at seven. Don't forget!"

And then she invites Mr. Barnes, as a set-off against the petticoats of Miss Ward

and herself (Emily Musgrave having long left her to return home), and Mr. and Mrs. Delamere, two very kind friends of hers, who live a short way out of Warmouth, and on the very afternoon, who should opportunely ride in from Leymouth, but Major Calvert, on whom she pounces eagerly, and declares her prisoner (not unwillingly on his part) for the day.

- "You are the very article I wanted," she says, laughingly, "for here I have a grand 'muffin worry' coming off this evening, and only two men to support me through it."
 - "And who are they?"
- "Mr. Barnes, and Mr. Delamere. I am sure you will like them both."
- "All right! I'm your man!" exclaims the Major, who looks relieved to hear the names of the expected visitors, and in you. III.

another minute, his horse being taken from him, and led round to the stable, he is peremptorily ordered into the garden, to pick flowers, and select fruit, for the coming "worry," and afterwards, under the directions of his hostess, to arrange them in their respective vases and dishes, at which trials of skill he proves himself to be very useless, hopelessly awkward, and excessively penitent, by turns.

But when the table is laid out for tea, it repays their trouble, and the Major ascribes more than half the effect to his own exertions.

"Quite like a supper," he decides, admiringly; "couldn't we get up a carpet hop after the 'worry,' Lady Gwynne?" and the soft laugh with which she receives his proposition of a 'hop' in her little drawing-room, with old Mr. Delamere,

himself, and the parson, for partners, is more like the light laughter he listened to at Felton, than any he has since heard issue from her lips.

The tea-table is certainly a subject for admiration, and it is no wonder that, after a ten mile canter along the sea shore, the hungry Major praises it. Raised pies from Exeter, and covered patés, that excite expectation; with cold game, and blushing lobsters, mingle in such a manner, with dainty salads, home-made cakes, crisp biscuits, clotted cream and fruit, as to disgust no palate, however particular, nor turn an appetite however blunted.

The tea and coffee cups are on the sideboard; iced water, claret, and such light wines are placed within the reach of all; whilst over everything is shed, like the richly scented flowers that intersperse each dish, an odour of refinement and good taste, recognisable by the lowest intellect.

But if the feast is elegant, the mistress of it, is still more so, and Major Calvert cannot take his eyes off her figure, as, clad in her sweeping mourning raiment (the cap of which, is the only symbol of her widowhood, she has discarded), she moves through the rooms appointed to receive her guests, with as much thought and care (not only for their comfort, but the indulgence of their taste), as though she were expecting the advent of crowned heads.

And he thinks, what a different aspect his comfortless bachelor quarters would assume, if such a presiding genius reigned simultaneously over them, and him.

Seven o'clock strikes - the Delameres

have arrived, so has Mr. Barnes; they wait for no one, but Mrs. Auberon Slade.

"A good little creature," Lady Gwynne whispers in confidence to Major Calvert; "and I like her very much, just as you said I should—but she is not always very punctual in keeping her engagements."

However, before the quarter strikes, she is actually announced, and on her heels, looking rather sheepish, and decidedly out of place, comes—Auberon Slade!

"Only fancy!" exclaims Mrs. Slade to her hostess, after she has recognized Major Calvert, and most awkwardly acknowledged (if acknowledged at all), the introduction afforded her by Lady Gwynne to the rest of the assembly, "Auberon would come, though I told him all you said, and that it was only a tea-party.

And he has always declared that he hates tea so."

"Then we will try if we can find him something better than tea to drink, in return for his complaisance," replies Lady Gwynne, smiling, though she is scarcely easy to see him there. "Mr. Slade, you know Major Calvert; what a lucky chance it is, that has brought you together this evening."

And to judge from the scowl that immediately overspreads the face of Major Calvert, and the unmistakable curl of Auberon Slade's nose, they seem to regard it as a very lucky chance indeed.

The "muffin worry" proceeds triumphantly; Major Calvert and Mrs. Slade placed fortunately at opposite sides of the table, lay aside, in the presence of more solemn duties, their mysterious feud, and,

to judge from the excellent appetites they display, find nothing to regret in the sacrifice they have made to friendship, in giving up their dinner.

Everyone talks, and eats, and appears at his ease, and it is not until the meal is concluded, and the party re-assembled in the drawing-room (where Miss Daisy, stretched out upon the sofa, is ready to receive them), that anything occurs to make Lady Gwynne repent, that she has brought her old Felton friends in contact with each other. The child is, as usual, delighted to meet Auberon Slade (whose scanty visits to the Orchard House have often been made the subject of her lamentations); and she calls him to her side, and makes him sit upon the sofa, where they indulge in little whispered confidences together, and kisses, stolen behind the shelter of her palm, which excite much merriment on the part of the spectators. And Major Calvert takes that opportunity to draw near Lady Gwynne.

- "I was not aware that you expected Slade this evening."
- "I did not expect him. His wife told me positively that he would not come; but he was included in the invitation."
 - "I am sorry I did not know it." She looks up surprised.
 - "Are you not friends, then?"
- "I would just as soon not meet him, and of all places—here."

She colours at the insinuation, and her answer is given coldly.

"I regret if I have been the means of drawing you into anything unpleasant; but I do not perceive how your objection to meeting Mr. Slade, can carry more force with it in one place, than another."

"That is, Lady Gwynne, because you cannot (or you will not) read my heart."

She has read it, or its intentions, some weeks before, but the perusal has not proved sufficiently, interesting to permit her to encourage him to open the book further.

"I have no desire to search into any heart, Major Calvert, that contains ill-will towards my friends. Mrs. Slade is an intimate visitor here, and no one who comes to see me, can avoid the risk of meeting either her husband, or herself. All my acquaintances have the alternative of course, but I should be sorry to see you exercise it. We have been friends too long, and too cordially, for me to contemplate the probability of your desertion, without regret."

She speaks so kindly, yet so decidedly, that he cannot mistake her meaning. She has no intention of shutting her doors against Auberon Slade: those who visit her, must shake hands with him—in other words, she loves him still! and Major Calvert listens, and sighs deeply.

"I understand you, Lady Gwynne, and will say no more upon the subject, except to express a hope that I have not offended you."

She assures him he has not, but he only looks half satisfied, as he steals into the garden after Mrs. Slade, who, as usual, when in the presence of her husband, talks very little, and has lost all her buoyancy of spirit.

In another minute Gwendoline finds that Auberon, seizing advantage of the Major's absence, has deserted Daisy, and taken up his station by her side. The party have mostly strolled into the garden by this time, and are dispersed among the flower-beds; Miss Ward is holding an animated discussion with her pupil on the advisability of her being carried off to bed; and for all the listeners that are interested in hearing what they have to say to one another, Lady Gwynne and Auberon Slade might be alone.

- "What is that fellow Calvert doing here?" he demands, rather roughly, as a preliminary to their conversation.
- "That fellow Calvert, Mr. Slade! Are you speaking of my friend Major Calvert?"
 - "You know I am."
- "I suppose he is 'doing,' much what you are doing yourself—conferring an honour and a pleasure upon me."
 - "I mean, what is he doing at War-

mouth?—what brings him down here? His regiment is stationed at Aldershott."

- "I believe it is, but his mother and sisters are stationed at Leymouth; and there is such a thing, as officers occasionally getting leave for the purpose of visiting their families."
- "He doesn't appear to give his family much of his society."
 - "He is staying with them."
 - "But he is here every day."
 - "Is he? I was not aware of that."
- "Well, Lottie met him here last week, and the day before yesterday, and he was in church with you, two Sundays ago."
 - "Yes?" interrogatively.
- "And it must be very unpleasant for you to have a great hulking fellow like that always hanging about you. I wonder you

don't give him his congé. He must bore you horribly."

"Oh! I can assure you he does not. Major Calvert is a very old friend of mine, and I have a great regard for him, and all his family. He is thoroughly kind, and honest, and true, and there is no one I would sooner see at the Orchard House than himself. He is always welcome here."

Her hearer can scarcely conceal his annoyance.

"Oh, well, of course, please yourself; it is of no consequence to me."

She is ready to cry, she feels so pained, yet still she answers stoutly:

"I never supposed it was. Shall we go into the garden? Your wife will think we are lost if we don't join her," and stepping out upon the lawn, she puts an end to the conversation. But the hardest trial of her

composure, is when they all re-enter the sitting-room, and Mrs. Auberon Slade becomes clamorous that she shall sing them a song; and Daisy (poor innocent Daisy, always making mischief without intending it) joins in the conspiracy against her.

"Now, dear Lady Gwynne," cries Lottie (Lottie mouths her title so, that Gwendoline Gwynne is sometimes sick of her own name), "you must sing us a song, for you know that I have never heard you, and Auberon says you sing so charmingly."

"Yes, do, mamma," urges Daisy, "it is such an age since you have touched the piano. I should so like to hear you again, and so would Auberon—wouldn't you, Auberon?"

But Lady Gwynne only looks conscious, and stammers out some excuse of not having any music, and not having practised for so long a time, for the truth is, she has never raised her voice in song, since the day it bid all hope depart from her with the love of Auberon Slade, and she does not believe that she shall ever sing again.

"Oh, mamma, darling, that's nonsense!" exclaims Daisy, in her anxiety to make matters easier; "because you used to sing all your songs without music, and you have some, that have never been written down. You have one that you composed yourself, mamma,—that Auberon wrote the words for—don't you remember it, Auberon? that one that you used to be so fond of; that begins, 'Oh, love! my own,' and which you wrote for mamma on the back of a letter, one Tuesday afternoon, when we were all sitting under the walnut trees together."

Lady Gwynne's face is scarlet, far more so than the occasion seems to demand; and she is quite unable to trust her voice in answer. But she is saved from the pain of hearing Auberon Slade's reply, by the renewed entreaties of her friends.

"We have so often heard of your music, Lady Gwynne," says Mrs. Delamere, "yet never had an opportunity of enjoying it. I am sure, if the effort will really not be too much for you, that it would give us all infinite pleasure."

"Oh, and she sings so beautifully too, Mrs. Delamere," interposes that wretched Daisy, with all a child's eagerness to praise its mother. "She used to sit at the piano all day sometimes, and sing to Auberon and me (you know you used, mamma), but she won't sing now. She has never sung, nor done anything jolly since we were at Felton"—in a voice of despondency.

"Hush, my dear!" says Mrs. Delamere,

"no, of course not—very natural." And then Major Calvert improves the occasion by observing, "I can answer for what Lady Gwynne's powers used to be, and cannot believe that they will fail her now. It is all amongst old friends, Lady Gwynne. Will you not indulge us?"

Major Calvert and the Delameres are regarding her fixedly in the face; Auberon Slade has turned away to the window; and Lottie (or it seems so, to her heated fancy) is looking jealously after her husband, and suspiciously towards herself. She feels baited, beset, like an animal driven to bay, and as though she could no longer refuse without betraying the secrets of her heart. Her countenance is flushed and anxious; but finding all her excuses put on one side, and her pleas of inability disregarded, she turns suddenly, and almost desperately

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towards the piano, sits down, and strikes an opening chord.

But with the first touch of the familiar instrument, so long untouched; with the first hearing of those notes, so long unheard; all the old associations of the past rush back upon her mind, like a flood that will not be restrained; and once more she sees him, bending over her, and confirming with each look of his eyes, the truth of the words, his hand has written.

Oh, if she dies for it, she cannot sing before him!

She tries to do it; her parched lips open but emit no sound; and after one or two vain attempts to satisfy her friends, she rises from the piano, with a face as white as death, and saying:

"You must excuse me, it is of no use

trying, I cannot do it," staggers from the room.

Then they are all excitement and conjecture, and Daisy is wild to be carried to her mother, but before Miss Ward has had time to follow her, she is among them all again.

"My dear friends, there is not the least occasion for your alarm. It is very foolish of me, not to be able to do as you desire me, but I am not strong. Daisy, my darling, have I frightened you? I shall have become more brave, before we have another 'muffin worry.'"

She laughs off their suspicions lightly, until they feel satisfied that what she says is true, and no reason but physical debility is to be assigned for her failure; all, that is to say, but the one heart that understands her own.

And he steals to her side (literally steals, so guilty does he feel, both in the action and the cause that prompts it), as she stands, some minutes later, in the moonlighted window, and holds converse with her dumbly; for she knows that he is there, although she neither turns to, nor addresses him.

The drawing-room is being illuminated, and wine and light refreshments handed round, and such of the company as have hearts, without being disagreeably conscious of the fact, are busily engaged in helping themselves and one another; whilst a German band (for German bands, as they pass from place to place, do find their way occasionally, even down to Warmouth) is playing, "Then you'll remember me," and not unsweetly, in the valley just below; (I feel this is a hazardous assertion, and open to

criticism, but still maintain that there are German bands, though few and far between, whose harmony is not all discord). Emboldened by the sounds within, and without, he presumes at last to speak to her.

"Is it possible that you really cannot sing? Don't give me the pain of feeling that I have silenced that voice, to which it used to be my greatest happiness to listen."

She tries to say he is mistaken, but the falsehood dies upon her lips.

"Gwendoline, speak to me!"

He has hardly pronounced the words before his wife's voice comes between them.

"Lady Gwynne, won't you have some fruit or some cakes? some of these little plum cakes, they are so nice! and I am sure a glass of wine would do you good. You don't eat and drink enough; you

hardly eat anything at tea time, for I was watching you." And, roused to a sense of what she owes her visitors, Gwendoline Gwynne returns to the centre of the lighted apartment, and does not again quit it, until they have separated for the night.

CHAPTER VII.

A SLIP OF THE TONGUE.

A MONTH has passed away, a ruddy month, during which those autumn glories, of which Gwendoline Gwynne spoke to Auberon Slade, have settled down upon the woods and dells of Warmouth, and it is once more September.

"A note from Fernside, my Lady," says the parlour-maid of the Orchard House, as she presents a twisted scroll of paper to her mistress.

Lady Gwynne looks up languidly from the writing on which she is engaged, and takes the note, and lays it beside her on the table. She is too busy to inspect it now; is far too sad at having to perform the task that lies before her, to have any heart to do so; for the letter she is composing, is in answer to one received that day from Major Calvert, in which he asked her to become his wife.

It is so hard to read the generous, manly, straightforward terms, in which he makes his offer; to remember all his kindness in the past; to think upon his handsome face, and figure, and warm heart; and yet to have no better words in which to thank him for it all, than those which, in the same breath, carry a denial of his hopes.

"My objections to your letter," so she writes, "arise from none of the causes you anticipate. I am not inclined to

quarrel with you, for being either presumptuous, or premature, for you know my past history, and I, your present But still it gave me the deepest pain to read your proposal, for the simple reason, that I cannot for a moment entertain it. Do not think hardly of me, my dear friend, nor attempt to shake my resolution, which is founded on nothing connected with yourself; but, I shall never marry again, and therefore, it will be inflicting useless torture upon both of us, to re-approach the subject. At the same time, you know what trouble it would give me to lose your friendship, which has been so sure and steady hitherto. What shall I say? Hope, I cannot give you, and yet I am so unwilling we should part. then according to your judgment, as to our meeting again, but regard this letter as my final answer, and believe that my heart can never waver, in the sincere regard it has always held for you."

She reads this over, two or three times, as though considering whether she can, by any possibility, make it sound less harsh, but failing to descry the means, heaves a deep sigh, and hastily placing the paper in an envelope, directs, and sends it to the post.

And then she has time to remember Mrs. Slade's neglected scrawl, for an answer to which, the servant informs her, that a man is waiting.

How different a specimen it is to the other.

"DEAREST LADY GWYNNE,

"Will you drive with me to-day to Torbridge? If so, I will call for you at three. The new horses go beautifully, and the carriage is so easy; but Auberon has gone somewhere shooting, and he has asked the Delameres, and several others, to dine here to-morrow, and there is no beef in the village, and the cook says she must have beef. And so I am going to fetch it, and I hate to drive alone. Do come, there's a dear, and the man will wait for an answer.

"Your loving LOTTIE."

Lady Gwynne does not take long to make up her mind. The day is close and sultry, and she has a slight headache, and a suspicious redness about the corners of her eyes, and a drive to Torbridge in an open carriage, is above all other things the one most likely to do her good. So she scribbles the words, "Yes, with plea-

sure," on a scrap of paper, and sends the messenger home again at once.

The pleasure of her anticipation is much augmented by the fact, that Lottie's husband is well out of the way, and not likely to interrupt their téte-à-tête. Sheis as good friends with Mrs. Auberon Slade as ever, indeed, more so, if the frequency of the girl's visits to the Orchard House may be quoted as a proof; but Auberon's conduct has, more than once of late, given her needless pain, and she has already begun to consider the expediency of going with Daisy to spend a few months with Sir Lyster's uncle, Mr. Hassell, who has often, since his nephew's death, entreated the widow and her daughter, to become the guests of his quiet home in Sussex. Only a few days before, she had been compelled to speak to

-;

Auberon, about his coming up so constantly in the evenings without his wife, to smoke his cigar in the verandah of the Orchard House; and it had been the more unpleasant for her to do so, because the man had so often met other gentlemen of her acquaintance there. But for him,—under all the circumstances of the case,—and considering that he had already made Lottie slightly suspicious of him on her account—it was not right, it was inconsiderate, unfeeling; she thought all this, although she did not say so.

Yet, even the slight hint she gave him, was but ill-received. She could see that, by the extremely courteous way in which he bowed, and thanked her for the trouble she had taken, and assured her she should have no reason to repeat it. And then walked homeward, forgetting to say good-night to Daisy, whose extreme affection for her friend Auberon, was one of the reasons, which made it doubly hard for her mother to say anything that should place a barrier between their intimacy.

Hard for herself, too, as Heaven might witness, but she knows it is her duty, and tries to rest upon that knowledge.

However, for to-day there is no chance of meeting him, and consequently Lady Gwynne can anticipate her drive to Torbridge with complete composure.

At three o'clock, true (for a wonder) to her time, comes Mrs. Auberon Slade, but the fact is, that her destination lies ten miles away; and whatever other advantages she has refused to profit by, something, or some one, has very vividly impressed upon her mind the absolute necessity of never being late for dinner.

The carriage and the horses are fresh purchases from London, which their owners have not used above a time or two, and Lady Gwynne is earnest in her admiration of both of them, whilst Lottie, listening, lies back upon the new cushions, with a look of entire satisfaction.

She has gained the desire of her heart; there is not another barouche, and pair of horses in the village.

"Yes, they're nice, aren't they?" she replies, glowing with pride. "Mr. Delamere said yesterday, that the horses are a great deal too handsome for Warmouth, and that these steep hills will pull their legs to pieces in no time. But Auberon declares it is all nonsense, that he would rather I drove no horses at all, than bad ones, and that when these are worn out he shall sell them, and get others."

"You are fortunate in having a husband so well able and disposed to gratify your tastes, Lottie. This is certainly a most charming carriage, and I wish I could afford to keep just such another. It puts me in mind of the one we used to have at Felton. But the horse on this side goes rather wildly, doesn't he?"

"They are not quite used to each other yet, I suppose," replies Mrs. Slade, who has not the slightest knowledge of horses or their ways.

"Were they broken in for Mr. Slade?"

"Well—I don't know, I really didn't enquire; but I believe they belonged to a duchess, so they ought to be good ones. Why, my goodness! here is Auberon!"

The coachman pulls up, and Mr. Auberon Slade, who is on horseback, after lifting his hat to Lady Gwynne, takes no more

notice of the inmates of the carriage, he is so busily employed in the examination of his new purchases.

- "That off-horse goes lame, Johnson," he observes to the coachman, after a critical survey.
- "Beg your pardon, sir, he doesn't, it's only his manner. He'll run easier after a bit."
- "Nonsense! I saw him give from the shoulder. Drive on for a few yards."

The order is obeyed, whilst the owner of the animals, bending to his saddle bows to observe their action, canters by the side. Five minutes pass, and the carriage is pulled up again.

"I believe you're right, Johnson, but the brute has no notion of trotting. Why do you let him bear to the right in that way?" "He'll go better after a little, sir; he's fresh this afternoon. He'll come home very different to this."

"By Jove! he shall go different too, if I have any power to make him do so. Here, James," to his groom, "take the horses back to Fernside, I am going to make these brutes listen to reason," saying which, he dismounts, and appearing for the first time to remember the presence of his wife, comes round to the carriage door.

"Where do you want to go to, Lottie?"

"Oh, we were going—but of course it isn't of any consequence—oh, yes, it is, though, because of the beef; but still, if you would rather go anywhere else, you know, Auberon——"

"Where were you bound for, when I met you? Can't you answer a plain question without beating about the bush in that way?"

"We were going to Torbridge, Mr. Slade, on an expedition to the butcher," replies Lady Gwynne.

"Thanks," with a very formal bow in the direction of her figure; "I shall have the honour, then, of driving you there."

"But, Auberon, I don't understand," says Lottie, with wide-open eyes, "I thought you were gone out shooting for the day."

"Well, then, you can employ your mighty intellect between this and Torbridge in trying to comprehend the stupendous fact that I have changed my mind again," he answers, as he climbs the carriage box and takes the reins from the hands of the unwilling Johnson.

It is a very different pace they go at 13-2

now, to what the steady coachman has been driving them. Something or other appears to have ruffled the sublime equality of Mr. Slade's temper, for he lashes the unfortunate horses under his control, till their young fiery blood rises to boiling heat, and with tossing heads, extended nostrils, and foam-bespattered flanks, they make the trees, hedges, and herds of cattle fly past them like a whirlwind.

"How famously we are going now," remarks Lottie, with a complacent smile; "how nice and fast dear Auberon is driving us!"

"A great deal too fast, in my opinion," replies Lady Gwynne, who, noting the fixed look in Johnson's countenance, and the horses' rapidly increasing pace, has turned rather pale.

"Do you think so?" returns Mrs. Slade;

"but perhaps you don't care about going fast! Now, in my idea, there is nothing to be compared to a good rattle through the park, it always seems to me——Ah! my goodness!—Auberon! save us! Oh! my! where are you going to?" which latter exclamations on poor Lottie's part, are extorted by the rude fact that the off-horse has shied violently at the trunk of a tree, turned the new carriage over on the highway, and propelled both the driver and his servant to the ground.

They are more surprised than hurt, having been simply tumbled into a muddy ditch, but the accident sobers Auberon in a moment, and quick as lightning he is up again, helping Johnson to loose the struggling animals, and right the vehicle. But a cry from his wife arrests him.

"Oh, Auberon! Lady Gwynne! oh, look

at Lady Gwynne! She is dead—you have killed her!"

He had caught a glimpse of Lottie thrown off the perpendicular, but evidently unhurt, and had fully imagined her companion was the same. But now, as he rushes to their assistance, he finds that the carriage, in tilting to one side, has thrown out Gwendoline upon the thicket, where she lies pallid and unconscious. In an instant he has pulled out his wife, anyhow, in any way, and having planted her upon the ground, returns to the rescue of her friend—and his. He lifts her with the greatest trouble; it is no light task to drag a well-grown woman over a prostrate carriage, and contrives, somehow, the perspiration pouring down his face the while, to convey her to the road.

But she is pale as death, and quite in-

sensible; her head falls feebly back on his extended arm; he puts his hand upon her breast, and searches eagerly for the beating of her heart. He cannot feel it: he almost believes, with Lottie, that her soul is flown.

"Gwendoline, dearest! my love! my life, wake up!" he cries passionately, though in a frightened whisper, as he gazes on her closed eyes and leaden-coloured lips. But Lottie, in her own alarm, is standing close beside him, and she hears the words. There are two men to look after the carriage and the horses, and they summon help from a neighbouring field, so that by the time that Gwendoline's grey eyes open to the light again (for she has only been partially stunned) they are able to re-enter the carriage, and slowly retrace the road to Warmouth. But Auberon Slade is no

more their driver; he sits on the back seat of the carriage, deeply anxious, humbly remorseful, and only desirous of one thing, that they may reach the Orchard House in safety.

"Lady Gwynne, dare I hope for your forgiveness? I shall never forgive myself."

"Pray don't mention it, Mr. Slade; accidents will happen, and we shall have forgotten it by to-morrow. Is it not so, Lottie?"

She places her hand affectionately in that of her young companion as she speaks, but Mrs. Slade withdraws her own. She is not likely to forget the drive to Torbridge for many days to come.

CHAPTER VIII.

BY THE SAD SEA WAVES.

It is some little while after the carriage accident, before Gwendoline Gwynne recrosses the threshold of the Orchard House. Although the danger was not imminent, the concussion and the fright prove sufficient to have seriously deranged her nervous system, and for several days (very unlike her own bright active self) she lies upon the sofa, or droops in an arm-chair, apparently quite indifferent to what goes on around her. When once more able to rouse herself, and resume her ordinary

duties, she is not surprised to hear that Auberon Slade has called almost every day and left a card of enquiry for her health,— a man who has endangered the life of his friend could scarcely do less,—but totally ignorant of the scene that took place during the period of her brief unconsciousness, she is puzzled to imagine why Lottie has not been to see her.

Lottie, in general so overpowering by reason of her expressions of unalterable attachment, and her desire to extract a similar sentiment from the lips of Lady Gwynne; one would have thought she would have been the first to fly to her side in time of sickness, and exhibit some proof of the devotion she so constantly insists upon. But she has not even called to ask how she is; and at first Gwendoline thinks little of the omission, for her hus-

band has been, therefore she must have received intelligence of her well doing, and the loss of Lottie's society is personally a great boon to her languid self. Indeed, she scarcely knows how, in an interval of so much weariness and consequent depression, she should have been able to endure it. But when a week and ten days have elapsed, and Mrs. Auberon Slade has not yet made her appearance, Lady Gwynne begins to fear that she also must have suffered from the rough handling which they mutually experienced.

"I am really afraid that Mrs. Slade cannot be well," she remarks to Miss Ward; "it is so very unusual for her to let more than a week elapse, without coming to the Orchard House."

"It is not illness that prevents her, Lady Gwynne, for Daisy and I met her yesterday in the village, and she looked as blooming as ever."

- "Really! What did she say?"
- "She spoke to Daisy for a minute, something regarding a little white dog which she had with her, I believe; but the interview was not long. You know the child never much cares about the company of Mrs. Slade."
- "But did she not speak of me—enquire after me?"
- "I do not think so, at all events I did not hear her, though I was standing close by all the while. But it is not often that Mrs. Slade honours me with her notice."
- "How very strange! I cannot understand it. I wonder if anything has happened to offend her? I must go to Fernside this afternoon and see."
- "Dear Lady Gwynne, you are not fit to go out yet."

"Oh, yes I am; and I could not rest until I have solved this mystery. Please order the pony-chaise to come round directly after dinner, Miss Ward; I must try and catch her, before she goes out for her afternoon drive."

Yet, notwithstanding her assertions to the contrary, Gwendoline Gwynne, taking her seat in the pony-carriage, feels almost too weak and languid to hold the reins. It is a sultry day towards the end of September; the hot sun pours down upon her head through the slight covering afforded by her crape-bound hat; she feels more than once, as though she cannot go through the task appointed her.

Yet still she perseveres; she does not love Lottie, but she believes that Lottie loves her, and that fact is of itself, sufficient to appeal to the soft heart of Lady Gwynne.

Should she by any means have offended the girl, or hurt her feelings (and although Gwendoline's own conscience is no help in aiding her to find a cause, it suggests that Auberon's conduct may have given her one), it is her duty to try and remove the fancied injury, or argue it away. affection Lottie bears to her, demands so much at her hands. But should she discover her surmise to be correct, (and her surmise goes no further than the notion that Mrs. Slade may have been foolish enough to turn sulky at her husband's frequent visits to the Orchard House), Lady Gwynne resolves on one thing: that she will at once put matters in train for paying that promised visit to the Hassells. It is very annoying and inconvenient to leave Warmouth just at that moment: annoying, because the autumn flowers are

in all their beauty, and she has a thousand little plans for next year's garden to carry into execution; and inconvenient, because Miss Ward has no desire to return home, and she cannot take her to a friend's house for an indefinite period. But if it must be so, it must.

Lady Gwynne has no idea of trifling with anything so sacred as a wife's fears, however silly and unfounded they may be; and at any trouble and expense, she will leave Mr. and Mrs. Slade to themselves for a few months, to see if the removal of her presence, and the undisturbed enjoyment of each other's company, may not serve to put their matrimonial matters on a better footing.

Her mind is full of this topic from the moment that she quits the Orchard House, and it is seething with it as she enters the drawing-room at Fernside, which is, as usual, empty. At first she almost fears that she shall find a difficulty in obtaining an interview with the mistress of the house, for one message is sent down after the other; first to say that Mrs. Slade is busily engaged, and next that she is just going out, and can see no one; but Lady Gwynne stands firm to her ground, and her final answer, that she has come on business of importance, and that if Mrs. Slade is not ready to receive her, she will wait until she is, has the desired effect, and in another minute Lottie, looking very red and very puffy, enters the apartment.

"How do you do, my dear?" says Lady Gwynne, in her usual voice, as she advances to meet her.

Her perfect equanimity appears rather to disturb the other's presence of mind (if Lottie's mind is ever present), and almost before she knows it, she has shaken hands with her.

"And is this all?" demands Gwendoline Gwynne, as she steadily scrutinizes her rival's changing countenance, "and after a separation of ten days, Lottie? We have been at our wits' ends to discover what had become of you. Have you been ill, my dear, or too busy to come up, as usual? This is the first time I have gone out since the occasion of that unlucky drive to Torbridge, or I should have been here before. Did you feel any bad consequences yourself from the fright?"

They are still standing together where they met, in the centre of the room, and their hands yet lie in one another's, for Lady Gwynne has clasped a firm hold over Lottie's plump palm, and the girl has not vol. III.

sufficient courage to draw it peremptorily away.

But her eyes are downcast, and her colour comes and goes. She is feeling, perhaps, as strongly as many a clever woman feels, but there are no words in that empty head wherewith to tell the emotions that are torturing her, and so she suffers, and is silent. But patience, it is only fear and gaucherie that keep her, for awhile, from expressing what she feels.

"No answer, Lottie?" continues Lady Gwynne, sorrowfully, after a pause, during which the other has carefully avoided meeting her eyes. "What have I done to deserve this altered treatment at your hands? If I have offended you, let me hear in what way, and I know that I shall be able to convince you it was unintentional."

But all the answer she receives is conveyed by the sudden wrenching of her companion's hand from hers, and the departure of Mrs. Auberon Slade to take possession of an arm-chair at the further end of the apartment, whence silently and sulkily, she gazes on the beds of bright flowers that lie before the window.

Thither, after the lapse of a few moments, Gwendoline Gwynne pursues her, and kneels by her side.

- "Lottie, dear girl! do tell me what have I done? in what have I failed as a friend towards you?"
- "I don't wish to speak to you," replies Mrs. Slade, with a look of injury.
- "But why, for what? Am I not even to know the cause?"
 - "You know it well enough!"

A flush of consciousness does irradiate

the face of Lady Gwynne, as she listens to these words, but still her voice is steady.

"I do not know what cause I have given you to turn against me; but if you have your suspicions, I wish to know them, that they may be removed. Had I not been a true and honest friend to you, Lottie, ever since the commencement of our acquaint-ance, I should not dare now to look you in the face, and beg you to tell me all."

"Who asked you to be my friend?" exclaims the girl, with sudden vulgar passion. "Who wanted to go up to your stupid house, or eat your nasty luncheons? I didn't! You invited me there, and if I had only known all I know now—"

"What do you know now?" demands the widow, calmly.

But the girl is silent; her cowardice is as conspicuous as her coarseness. She can-

not be brave and honest at the same time.

"I know that I invited you to the Orchard House," continues Lady Gwynne; "that I gave you a frank, free, cordial invitation there, and I do not think you can accuse me of ever having neglected to extend as hearty a welcome. But I did it for your own good, not mine."

"I don't believe it!"

"If so, I do not suppose that any arguments on my part will make you believe it, Lottie! But, at all events, you will admit that when a young, inexperienced girl like yourself associates intimately with a woman of my age, the benefit that accrues is likely to be more on her side, than mine."

"I don't see that. You asked me for your own purposes, and I—I hate you!"

"Oh, Lottie!" and there is no need for

the failing, reproachful voice to utter more.

"I do! and I don't care if all the world hears it. What did I want with your advice about clothes, and dinners, and all that rubbish? Going on at me, as you did, in your double-faced manner, and pretending that it was only for my good, and all the time it was for Auberon, and not for me! There! I know so much!" with a vindictive look towards her pale, calm rival.

"Well, Lottie, and if it were? Suppose I have no desire to deny it? Your husband was my friend long before yourself, and if I perceived that your girlish inexperience, (which, as God is my witness, I have always made the best of in his eyes), was likely to prove a source of misery and discontent between you, to which of you

did I do wrong in my attempt to remove it? What object could I have in view in doing so, except the hope to make you dearer and more necessary to him?"

"Oh, of course, you may say so now! but it is of no use trying to blind me any longer. I know it all; I have told Auberon so, and he says that I am right!"

At this information, Gwendoline Gwynne rises to her feet.

"He says that you are right? Right in what? Explain yourself, Lottie, I insist upon it!"

Her impressive manner has the desired effect.

"Right in believing that he is in love with you, and always has been! I don't care if he tears my eyes out for telling you so, and I wish to goodness I had died before I had ever met him!" and Lottie's grand

bravery resolves itself into tears. But her companion does not cry, although the blow strikes even deeper on her heart.

"Oh, Lottie! Lottie! I am so sorry! I wish, too, that I had died before I met him or you! I wish I could wipe out this injury with my blood!"

"It's all very fine to say so now," sobs the offended wife, "but you ought never to have stayed in the same place with us. I suspected all this long ago, when I found a lot of his trumpery poetry addressed 'To G——,' and with last year's dates upon them. And when I taxed him with it, all he said was, that I was 'deuced lucky' to get him at all, love or no love. As if that would satisfy a woman. And the other day, I became sure of it."

"What other day? Oh, tell me all!"

"The day of the accident, when you fainted, and I heard him call you 'Gwendoline,' and his 'life,' and his 'love,' and all kinds of nonsensical folly, that a man, with any pretensions to cleverness, should have been ashamed of. He never said anything like that to me."

Lady Gwynne turns very white, and staggers backward.

- "It was heartless of him!" she gasps; "oh! worse than heartless—infamous!"
- "You say so?" demands Lottie, lifting her swollen eyelids with astonishment.
- "I say so!" repeats Lady Gwynne, steadily; "of course I do. Who should have a better right to say so than myself? Listen to me, Lottie."
- "No! no! I don't want to hear anything more about it!"
 - "But you shall listen! It is true that

your husband and I loved each other, but it was long before he had any thoughts of making you his wife, and when I (to my shame be it spoken), was a married woman. You are old enough (with all your innocence) to understand that there could but be two endings to such a guilty love as that, either separation, or disgrace, and we chose the former. We chose to separate, and see no more of one another; and then Auberon met you, and took you to his arms, to be, as I sincerely hoped, his comfort for the loss of me. Since then, your husband has been my friend—nothing more—and not so much my friend as you have been. This is the entire truth."

"He called you 'dearest,'" mutters Mrs. Slade.

Her nature is not sufficiently generous to appreciate the nobility of the confession that has been made to her, and she finds it difficult to believe there is not more behind.

- "Did he?" returns Gwendoline, mournfully, "it is more than I have ever called him since those days. I have not even spoken his Christian name. Don't you believe me, Lottie?"
- "I don't know what to believe," grumbles the other. "In love with a married man! It's so wicked—so unnatural—so disgraceful!"
- "I allow it is disgraceful—so are all our sins."
- "And then, to come here and shake hands with me, and call me your friend! I should like to know what my mamma will say when she hears of it."
- "Lottie!" in a voice of determination, "don't you dare to speak to me in that

tone again! I have been very weak, I know that well enough, but I have done nothing that should prevent your giving me your hand, or I never would have taken it. I am ready to acknowledge all my faults, but there is a vast difference between humility and obsequiousness, and no woman shall ever repeat the expressions you have presumed to use respecting me."

At this address, all Mrs. Auberon Slade's bravado gives way, and she grows red, and stops her ears, and howls pathetically.

"Go away! go away! I don't want to hear what you say. I never wish to see you again. You are a very wicked woman; and so is Auberon,—and I am sure my mamma will say so. Oh!—oh!—oh!" and the remainder of her tirade is lost in an effusion of childish sobs.

"I am going away," replies Lady Gwynne, quietly, as she compassionately regards the weeping girl. "Going away, not only from Fernside, Lottie, but from Warmouth altogether. And perhaps, when there are miles of distance between us, and you have leisure to consider calmly what has passed, you will not think me so wicked as you do now. It was a mistake on my part, to imagine that an intimacy between you and me, could ever come to good, but I encouraged it for the best. Will you not say that you forgive me before we part?"

Mrs. Slade has ceased sobbing; she hears every word that issues from her adversary's mouth as plainly as though it were shouted in her ear, but no answer comes to Lady Gwynne's appeal.

"Only one word, Lottie! Only say that

you do not believe I courted your friendship in order to enjoy that of your husband more securely. Acknowledge so much; you know it is the truth."

Still there is reply. Lady Gwynne waits for it a few seconds, and then even more sorrowfully proceeds:

"If you cannot believe me blameless, if my affection for, and my interest in, you, pass for nothing in your eyes, still say that you forgive. The offence, though bitter, has been unintentional; let the pardon be full and free. I shall require something to carry away with me as comfort when I leave Warmouth and your presence for ever."

But it is evident that the comfort is not to come from Mrs. Auberon Slade, who remains in her former position, and makes no sign. "Oh, Lottie! I could not have believed it. May God forgive you!" exclaims Gwendoline Gwynne, as she rushes from the apartment.

Her little carriage is waiting at the door, and in another moment she has leapt into it, and seized the reins, and urged the astonished pony to its utmost speed. wants to be gone, at once and for ever; to leave Fernside and its unpleasant memories far behind; to wipe out the impression, if she can, of Lottie's insults and bitter incredulity. She thinks of all she has done for this girl; of the many weary hours she has spent in her society, the peace and quietness which for her sake she resigned, the trouble with which has attempted the improvement of her natural powers; and then reflects on her ingratitude, the vain appeals to

affection, her low taunts and base insinua-

Is it possible she can have brought this upon her own head—and for what? the desire to amend the self-imposed condition of one, who has had no hesitation in rendering all her labour void, by an avowal of their mutual weakness, and to avenge his own thwarted inclinations by dragging her name (which of all others he should have held sacred) down into the dirt.

The thought is too bitter, too painfully oppressive, to be sustained with equanimity, and as it bears with its full force upon her mind, she draws rein, and suddenly alighting from the pony-carriage, desires her groom to take it back to the Orchard House, and inform Miss Ward that she shall return home on foot.

And, as soon as the man is out of sight

dashes down impetuously to the sea-shore, where she may be alone, to look her sad future in the face, and decide upon its actions.

For the shore of Warmouth is not like the crowded beach of a fashionable watering-place, but a long, narrow, unfrequented strand, backed by dark rugged cliffs, that overshelve and keep it private. And there is something in the hoarse voices of the waves as they break over the rocky shingles, that Lady Gwynne feels will be consonant with the melancholy music in her own breast. For there she can weep freely, without sense of loneliness, or fear of supervision; and does so weep, as she falls upon its pebbly bosom, hot weary tears, that are shed for herself, and him, and the ingratitude that has stung her to the quick. How long she lies there she

can hardly tell, for she is too sad to mark the flight of time; but the voice that rouses her is one that might almost call her from the dead again.

"Lady Gwynne! here, and alone; what is the matter? I trust you are not ill."

As she hears Auberon Slade speak thus, in a tone of the tenderest solicitude, she rises quickly to her feet, and proudly sweeps her tears away, and regards him with a look of scorn.

"What right have you to intrude upon my hours of privacy?

"No right," he answers humbly, "I am far from claiming it; but this beach is free to all, and passing to my home and seeing you lie here, I thought, that as a friend——"

"A friend!" she interrupts, disdainfully, "a fine friend you have proved to me, who,

not content with robbing me of all that made life valuable, my self-respect and credence in your worth, have added to the injury, as the basest coward that walks this earth would almost scorn to add, by publishing my weakness to the world."

- "Of what do you accuse me?"
- "Of adding the last drop to the bitter cup your inconstancy placed to my lips, and poisoning the peace of the unfortunate woman you have made your wife, by telling her of the attachment that I once believed in."

He steps backward with surprise.

- "Who told you this?"
- "She did. I have but just come from her."
- "Then she told you false; for the history of that part of my life and yours, is, as it ever will be, sacred to me. Do

you really think so badly of me as to suppose it could be otherwise?" But the pathos of his lowered voice has no effect upon her.

- "Then you have permitted her to gain the information by indirect means."
- "She has accused me of loving you. I acknowledge so far, and I did not positively lie in answer. How could I?"
- "You have, in fact, been so careless of my reputation and her happiness, as to allow suspicion to accumulate about us both."
- "Your reputation, Lady Gwynne, has always been my chief solicitude; for her happiness I confess that I care nothing."
- "Then you should be ashamed of yourself to say so."
- "Should I ?—Yet my happiness does not appear to be a subject of absorbing interest to others."

- "You have at all events as much as you deserve."
- "I knew that was your opinion, Lady Gwynne, by the little care you take to preserve it to me."
- "I—what have I to do with your happiness, or any portion of it?"
- "The only portion that I now possess lies in yourself, you know that well enough, and—yet—yet—"
 - "Yet,-what?"
- "Yet," with sudden energy, "you will drive me mad by letting that brute Calvert make love to you, before my very eyes."

But this accusation, so unwarrantable, so unjustifiable, in every way, excites her indignation, instead of rousing her sympathy.

"And if so, by what authority do you

find fault with my proceedings? Am I not free to be courted by, and marry whom I will? What license have I given you, to question me on such a subject?"

"The license of the confession of your love for me," he answers boldly.

"The confession of my love? The license which that gave you, passed away with the occasion. How dare you, a married man, come and remind me of a weakness which has been washed out long ago, by floods of penitential tears."

The allusion is too much for both of them, and for several minutes they are silent.

And then she speaks again:

"Tell me, if in all the course of our unfortunate acquaintance, I tried by any meretricious means to excite your admiration. Did I ever put on a ribbon, or a

flower, or a jewel, that was assumed for the especial end of rendering myself attractive in your eyes?"

- "I never supposed you did."
- "And when, without effort on your part or mine, our hearts seemed to be drawn together by some invisible power, and welded into one, was it your happiness, your good, your gratification, or my own, that I most thought of, when a momentary weakness made me consent to mutual infamy, and a heaven-born strength enabled me—spite even of your protestations—to re-take my word!"
- "I know you did it more for my sake than your own."
- "And, since your marriage, which, in this hour, (perhaps the last hour I shall ever spend with you), I have no hesitation in avowing, was the deepest grief you

could have inflicted on me; have I gone back from my resolution to be your friend, and guard the secret which is my disgrace and yours? I have neither fallen sick, nor gone about my avocations weepingly, nor betrayed in any way that I am aware of, the agony I have passed through."

"I know that you have borne up nobly," he answers, in a broken voice.

"I came down here on purpose that I might find rest, and quiet, and freedom, from the daily pain of seeing you, yet here you followed me, and brought your bride, to bid me hourly look upon her happiness, and remember what I had lost."

"Oh, no! oh, no, Gwendoline! for God's sake, think anything but that."

"Did I shrink from the task you set me? Have I not tried to gain her friendship? make her time pass pleasanter? and smooth the little irregularities of domestic life for both of you? And yet this—this is my reward! That you should lightly let her guess the bitter secret of my past, spoil all my good intentions by the knowledge that I have marred, instead of increasing, the peace of your fireside, and lower yourself still more in my estimation than your fickle conduct to myself had lowered it. Have I deserved no better at your hands than this. Is inconstancy, coldness, untruth, and bitter mockery, all the reward my patient, uncomplaining love must look for?"

She gazes at him, as in all the distressing scenes through which they have passed together she has never gazed before, and Auberon Slade shrinks abashed beneath the angry fire of her eyes.

- "Gwendoline! I acknowledge all that you have advanced against me, except one thing. I have been mad, passionate, careless, desperate, if you will, but I have never been untrue to you, not even by a thought!"
- "Not untrue to me, and yet you married?"
- "Yes! to my misery; but if you only knew the history of that marriage—"
 - "You were your own master."
- "I was not my own master. Rage, and disappointment, and passion, had the mastery over me, and I succumbed to them. Oh, if I had possessed but a tithe of your angelic patience, if I had only waited for a few short months—"
- "Hush, hush! we must not speak of that now."
- "There is no need. To our misery, we know it without recapitulation. But when

I parted with you, Gwendoline, no thought of such a contingency ever crossed my mind. The future seemed as hopeless as the past, and my only remembrance was of the many tears that I had cost you. And yet I felt my unsubdued passions raging in me like a sea that would not sleep, and I believed so entirely in their strength, and the strength of your devotion, that I felt if we ever met again, and read the agony of separation in each other's eyes, our downfall would be certain. And so, in my desire to save you, by placing an insuperable barrier between us, I weakly did (what I feel now to have been wickedly done), I married Charlotte Cameron."

"For my sake?" she cries, almost joyfully, so frail is human nature!

"Yes, for your sake (as I then supposed it), and my own, and made myself miserable for life!"

- "Oh, Auberon—!" The tone thrills through him, for it is the first time she has called him by his name since the day they parted.
- "You know it, Gwendoline! you must know it! How can I be happy, or ever hope to be so, with a woman who has not one idea in common with myself, who has not even the sense to perceive the fact."
- "But, Auberon, she loves you, and that is everything."
 - "In this case it is—nothing!"
- "Not if you resolve to make it otherwise. I do not say that Lottie is clever, or accomplished, or even sensible. It would be simple flattery. But she is affectionate, and your conduct lately has greatly wounded her. How could it be otherwise?"
- "It is her own fault, she would marry me."

- "No, Auberon, it is your fault, and yours alone. No honourable man ever yet reproached a woman for loving him too much. But there is time to redeem the past. Go home, resolving to be faithful, and kind, and patient with her henceforward, and Lottie will yet repay you for the sacrifice."
- "I cannot pretend to love her, for I love no one but yourself! A woman will not be duped in that particular. You will see it is impossible!"
- "I shall not see it, Auberon, for I am going away."
 - "Going away? Where to?"
- "That I have not yet decided on, but wherever it is, you must not follow me. We have made a great mistake, you in coming here, and I in not leaving Warmouth when you came; but my eyes are open now, and I see clearer."

"Oh, Gwendoline, you must not go! Your friendship is my only solace, the one thing for me, that Fate has not yet laid her sacrilegious fingers on."

He turns towards her; he is bold enough to seize her hand; his eyes gaze into hers, glistening through their tears, the first tears she has ever seen upon the cheeks of Auberon Slade, and her own rush up to meet them.

"No, Auberon! not that, for God's sake!"

She looks away from him, and over the dark, sullen sea, and struggles with the woman's weakness that would clasp him to her breast; and stamps it down, and is herself again.

- "Auberon, listen to me!"
- "I am listening, heart and soul!"
- "For the very reason that our company

is so dear to one another, I must go! is too dangerous a pleasure to be safe or right for us, and I shall leave Warmouth as soon as I possibly can, and never see the place again whilst you are here. But I shall quit it, Auberon, far happier than I entered it (though earthly hope is as distant from me now as it was then), for the idea that all that you had said to me at Felton was untrue; a disordered fancy of your mind, which vanished before the test of separation; has been my greatest trouble. But I shall never think of that again, and now, before we part in this world for ever, you must make a promise to me, and keep it faithfully."

- "I will do anything at your bidding that lies in my power."
- "Try, then, to make Lottie happier. It will be some time before she gets over the

knowledge of your love for me; but if you are honest with her, and in your desire to make amends for the past, she will soon forgive you, for all her feelings are upon the surface."

"I can never be happy, whatever she may be."

"The best happiness this world affords us, is that which we derive from making the happiness of others. Ah, Auberon! who knows if even you and I would have been happy with each other long? We thought so much of this world's pleasures, and so little of the next."

"I should have been but too glad to risk it," he murmurs, sadly.

"Hush! Heaven has decided otherwise for us. Let us be content," and voluntarily she places the hand which she has withdrawn, within his own again. "Good-bye! God bless and keep you! but you must neither write nor strive to follow me," and with that she turns to leave him.

"Gwendoline! Gwendoline! one word! don't leave me thus—I cannot bear it!"

"God bless you!" she repeats solemnly, with uplifted eyes, that droop again to dwell for a moment tenderly upon his own, and they are the last words he hears her utter.

She reaches the Orchard House in a state of such exhaustion as to alarm Miss Ward, who cannot imagine why Lady Gwynne should have been so imprudent as to attempt to climb on foot the steep hill that leads to her home, on the very first day of venturing out of doors; and yet, before they

can persuade her to lie down to rest, she insists upon writing a letter of importance.

The letter is addressed to Mr. Lawrence, to whose kind keeping she confides all that has passed: her hopes, her fears, her efforts for the improvement of another, and the failure by which they have been crowned. And then she tells him of her resolution to quit Warmouth, and at once.

"I shall let my house and go abroad. I do not stay, dear friend, to ask your advice in this matter, for I have obtained higher counsel: God and my conscience have decided for me."

"Mamma, darling!" exclaims Daisy, "let me read to you to-night, you do look so tired, and then we will both go to bed." The weary spirit acquiesces willingly, and

in another moment the child's clear voice is rising on the evening air. She has selected her own chapter, and for a short time her mother listens without hearing, so distracted are her wandering thoughts, until the following words recall them:

"Now no chastening for the present seemeth to be joyous, but grievous; nevertheless, afterwards it yieldeth the peaceable fruit of righteousness unto them which are exercised thereby."

"Oh, Daisy! Daisy! it is for His sake!"

"Mamma! mamma! what is this?" for Lady Gwynne has fallen on her knees beside the child's couch, and is sobbing hysterically on her outstretched arms.

"Overtired," decides Miss Ward, as she rushes to the aid of her employer, and carefully assists her in mounting to her bedroom. "I was sure, dear Lady Gwynne, that that walk would prove too much for you. You must remember that such a shock as you have received, is not to be got over in a day."

CHAPTER IX.

TEN YEARS AFTER.

TEN years!—and, after all, what are they? Endless in prospect to the young, perhaps, but to the middle-aged a mere cycle of days, and weeks, and months—a breath of the eternity to which we hasten!

And yet they are powerful for good or evil; life, and death, and change; and the only man who can look back upon the last ten years, and say with truth, that he has gained by them, is the man, whom every twelve hours plants one day nearer God and Heaven!

But if the unceasing course of time brings many troubles, it also dries up many a tear. Where is your despair, brave bridegroom, who leads this morning to the altar a second wife; where the heart-broken sighs, the quivering eyelids, the hopeless accents with which you committed your first treasure to the darkness of the tomb, and the marriage-bed of silence! Gone! forgotten! locked away with the crape band which has scarce had time to rust upon your hat, and the long face which lasted until another wooing had begun!

Where is the dread, pale widow, with which you set out upon your second trial of life's journey, alone and unprotected, hearing a death sigh in each murmur of the wind, and reading kindred trouble on the brow of every one who jostled you upon the way? You step out bravely now, without aid from any quarter, and scarcely missing the help that Heaven withdrew; and on your fresh and comely countenance, in which I see reflected the smiles of sons and daughters, I can recognise no sign of tears, nor even trace the channels where they ran!

And where your grief, young mother, as you gazed passionately, for the last time, upon the cold inanimate countenance of your first-born, and felt as though a part of your own soul were about to be torn from you, and hidden in the dust with him? You smile! your eyes turn from me to fall upon a group of rosy cherubs, clustering about your chair, or nestling in your bosom—and I am more than answered. Time has been potent to heal all these

troubles. The passage of ten years has scattered wonders in its train!

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And therefore it would be folly to suppose that such an interval could pass over the head of my heroine, and the other characters of this unpretentious story, without effecting a great change, though not so vast a one as may, perhaps, on a first hearing, be imagined.

The time that makes of children, men and women, and turns the middle-aged into the old, deals far more lightly with us, as we pass through the prime of life; and the eyes that had seen Lady Gwynne look for the last time upon Warmouth, would not perceive any startling difference in her appearance as ten years later—a woman now of six and thirty—she sits in her private apartments in a hotel in Paris,

quietly employed upon some feminine occupation.

A trifle more fullness in the figure perhaps, which rather adds to, than deteriorates from, its former beauty; and a more settled gravity about the eyes and mouth, but the same faint roseleaf flush upon the delicate skin, the same sweet smile and look, the same bright hair, untouched by any envious streak of gray!

She is alone, and she has been working; but at the moment when we first encounter her again, the muslin and embroidery are lying prone upon her lap, and she has laid back her head upon the cushions of the chair, and clasped her hands, and lost herself in thought.

Of what? Of the byegone days in which she prayed and wept so much, and from which she emerged as from a furnace of affliction; of Felton — Warmouth — Auberon Slade's last words, or his wife's cold ingratitude. Hardly! Of what can we be dreaming? Remember! all that took place ten years ago.

She is far likelier to be calculating how much more money Miss Marguerite Gwynne's costumes will swallow up before the season is concluded; or when the girl intends to return from her afternoon ride; or if she remembers that she was at a ball last night, and is engaged out again this evening!

For when Gwendoline Gwynne, discovering the error into which she had fallen, resolved on quitting England, it was with no half intention of working out her cure. She had made the mistake of supposing that where love and passion have once dwelt together, and been but partially

uprooted, it is possible, with any hope of happiness, to substitute an honest friendship, and grievously disappointed by the result. But it had taught her, what she had often heard, but never seemed to grasp in its full sense before, that if that deadly cancer Sin is to be rendered harmless to the soul, it must be, not only cut out root and branch and cast away, but we must lose the remembrance of where it lies. is not sufficient for the purposes of God that we should forsake sin only, we must teach ourselves to hate it; that that, which seemed at one time so beautiful to us, may become as a leprous body, loathsome and abhorrent.

And so Lady Gwynne had resolved, with the help of Heaven, to teach herself, and been successful. She had come abroad with a very heavy heart, but a full determination not to nurse her sorrow; and taking up her first residence (for Daisy's sake) at one of the German watering places, had refused to adopt no means, by which she thought it likely she might chase away the recollection of her grief. For the first year she had had some trouble, to suppress without appearing cruel, the correspondence which Auberon Slade had forced upon her; but, by persevering in her gentle remonstrances, she had brought him round at last, to regard matters in the same light that she did; and a complete silence has since been maintained between them.

Of course, through indirect means, she has from time to time received intelligence of him, but she has never gone out of her way to seek it; and at the present moment is as ignorant of his whereabouts, as though she had never heard his name.

She knows that, shortly after she had quitted Warmouth, he also left the place, and took up his residence in London; that, thence he has launched sundry fragmentary compositions on the world, which have never surpassed mediocrity, and greatly disappointed those of his admirers who counted on him as a rising genius; that he has had several children born to him; and that a few months back his wife died, though from what cause, no one has even taken the trouble to inform her.

Auberon Slade is free. Gwendoline Gwynne knows that much, but has not the least idea, in consequence, that they will ever meet again, or wish to do so—so deep is her conviction that beneath the weight of private and professional cares, her image must have been eradicated from his heart! Besides now—at six and thirty—it would

be too preposterous!—and when a woman can think calmly to herself of love and marriage as "preposterous" it is a sure sign that she has had enough of both of them.

During the last few years, she has resided over so many parts of the Continent, that she is not quite sure whether she feels most German, or most French; and Daisy appears to be familiar with every language under the sun.

Only once, during that period, has Gwendoline Gwynne revisited England; and then she remained at Felton Hall all the time, on a visit to Sir Richard and his young wife and family, and took good care not to go near the metropolis, except to pass through it, on her journeys, to and fro.

And she thoroughly enjoys continental life. Grief does not seem to carry its funereal solemnity here, with half the weight

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it does in England; the air is less dense, the temperature more equable, even the food is lighter, and more easy of digestion. Yes, Lady Gwynne loves the Continent, and so does her daughter; they are talking of Italy for next year; they are perfectly happy here—they never intend to reside at home again.

There is a commotion on the landing just outside the room—the sound of a pleasant girlish voice, chattering volubly and rather shrilly, in good French; and the mother's colour quickens, and her eyes turn expectantly towards the door, already moving on its hinges.

"Well! darling," she exclaims affectionately, as a figure clothed in a riding habit enters the room, "home at last?"

But can this be Daisy? Daisy who, when we parted from her, was lying on her back, unable to turn, or move without assistance? Let us remember—that was ten years ago! and this is indeed herself.

With a full, upright figure, made graceful by the natural buoyancy of nineteen; a bright happy face, blue eyes, and golden hair, Marguerite Gwynne is a beautiful woman—which her mother never was.

Five or six years of patient, unremitting care, fulfilled the prophecy of Dr. Aberystwith, and rewarded Lady Gwynne for all her trouble; for then it was, that Daisy stood upright and walked again, and from that moment, rapidly gained health and strength—and is now upon the verge of womanhood, so quick in intellect, joyous of temperament, and taking in appearance, that her mother believes her to be simply irresistible; and dreading the hour when they shall be called upon to separate, sees a

would-be robber, in every man that talks or dances with her daughter, and has almost arrived at hating the whole sex, in dread of the parting which she fancies close at hand.

For Daisy is her one great joy and pride, and firmly believing there never existed a more lovely specimen of humanity, than this creature of her own creating, Lady Gwynne is quick to take offence where she is slighted, and to honour those, who pay her beauty fitting reverence. Not that Gwendoline thinks so much of outside merit, for never has she given her own features a passing thought, except to criticise them; but Daisy—Daisy has such blue, blue eyes, such golden tresses; so very fair a skin;—so her doting mother argues—wondering the while, with simple wonder, born of love, how she has been fortunate enough to keep this dar-

ling by her, for the space of nineteen years. And though Miss Gwynne may not appear to all eyes, just the same as she does to those of her adoring parent, she is certainly a very pretty girl, and a most favourable specimen of Saxon beauty.

"Where have you been, my child?" continues Lady Gwynne, as Marguerite stoops down to kiss her, "you are so much behind time, I felt quite anxious."

But as Lady Gwynne is always anxious, when her child is out of sight, and her alarm is nothing new, Miss Daisy is unfilial enough to laugh at it.

"Only scampering about the Bois, you dear old thing!—You might have guessed that without my telling you. And I don't believe I am more than five minutes after my time. Old Duclos is too stingy about his horses for that. By the way, mother, do we dine at the De Frelius to night, or here?"

"Just as you like, darling! Do you feel at all tired?"

"Not a bit!—but I was thinking how it would bother you to go, after sitting out that horrid ball last night, and with the anticipation of another for this evening. Why can't I go to the Embassy with Madame De la Brissac? She has offered to chaperone me—."

"And deprive your poor old mother of the pleasure of seeing you enjoy yourself, Daisy?" replies Lady Gwynne reproachfully.

"Oh! no! darling—you know I wouldn't —only I am so afraid of your knocking your-self up. And it must be so stupid for you, since you never dance.—Why don't you dance, mother?—Monsieur Martignon would not believe yesterday that we were mother and daughter; he said it was impossible, and that we looked just like two sisters."

Gwendoline smiles.

- "That's an old compliment, Daisy; I think I've heard it before."
 - "But you do look very young, mamma!"
- "That is no reason I should dance, my dear!—I shall never do that again, you may depend upon it. Had you not better change your habit, you look so warm?"

Upon which Miss Gwynne walks slowly and thoughtfully out of the room, but has hardly reached the landing, before, with a sudden rush, she has returned again.

- "I knew I had something to tell you, mother: Auberon Slade is in the Hôtel."
 - " What-my child?"
- "Auberon Slade!—the man we used to know at Warmouth, don't you remember?— At least, I suppose it is the same. I saw there had been a new arrival, on coming in just now, and so I asked François for

the visitors' book—and there it was,— 'Mr. Auberon Slade and family, from London,'—I never asked if they were going to stay here—shall I?"

"No—no! dear, certainly not. We are sure to hear in time! I wonder what can bring him to Paris?"

"Pleasure, I suppose! Didn't his wife die last spring?"

"Yes."

"I thought I had heard so! Well, you wouldn't refuse the poor man an outing after that, would you?—I dare say, he hasn't had a real holiday since his wedding day. She was a wretch, if I remember rightly. I ouldn't bear her!"

"Oh! Daisy, Daisy! she is dead!"

"Well, mother! I never could understand why people, who have been odious all their lives, should become saints directly they die! Surely, it is better to abuse them when they can't hear you, than when they can!"

"It is better never to abuse them at all, my child."

"I am afraid I haven't arrived at that pitch of sanctity yet! Well! I hope this stranger will prove to be our Auberon Slade, for he was a jolly fellow; and I used to flirt tremendously with him, down at Warmouth, —used I not, mother?"

The laugh with which Lady Gwynne acquiesces in this fact is a little forced and nervous; but her daughter is too pre-occupied to observe it, and quits the apartment, singing Gounod's "Marguerite," in a strong, clear voice, that can be heard to the very top of the flight of stairs that leads to their bed-chambers.

Whilst her mother, reassuming the attitude in which Daisy found her,

attempts to realise the news she has just heard.

Auberon Slade! in Paris! close at hand, under the same roof! Can it be possible? And yet, after all, what circumstance more likely to occur? The wonder is, that throughout this lapse of time they have never met before.

And yet Lady Gwynne's heart beats very little faster for the thought that before long they may stand face to face. Curiosity is there, busy at work to learn how he has passed the intervening years, and if they have dealt gently by him, and with what feelings he will take her hand again—a subdued pleasure, too, to think that now, perhaps, they may really prove true friends to one another, and derive great contentment from their social intercourse; but nothing more than this! The heart-burnings and throb-

bings, and aching, restless pains, have been trampled under-foot with the fierce passions that gave them birth, or kindly put to sleep by the sedatives of Absence, Time, and Silence; and though the name of Auberon Slade stirs up old memories, and makes her restless and uneasy, it is more the uncertainty respecting the feelings with which he will regard the past that disturbs her, than any fears for her own peace in the present.

What ought she to do regarding him—how act? That is the question which is puzzling her. Under ordinary circumstances, she should immediately have written to so old a friend, apprised him of her vicinity, and begged him to come and see her; but she shrinks from putting herself forward for the notice of Auberon Slade.

How can she tell if he desires to meet

her again—if he would even have chosen that hotel had he known she was an inmate there? And then, to be repulsed, to have her hospitable offers met with cold politeness, or unresponded to—and at his hands! Oh, she could not bear it! She must leave it all to chance. He is sure, in time to hear her name or her daughter's, and then may act as he thinks fit, concerning them!

Chance is nearer at hand, however, than Lady Gwynne supposes it to be, for even whilst she ponders over this, Daisy's step, not unaccompanied, resounds upon the stairs; and Daisy's voice is heard in active colloquy at the half-opened door.

"Come in! of course, come in! She will be charmed to see you! Mamma! here's Auberon Slade. I met him on the stairs, and 'spotted' him at once. It's the most extraordinary thing in the world; if you had asked me just now to describe one of his features to you I couldn't have done it for my life—and yet, directly I saw him, I recognised him—now didn't I?" (turning to her companion), "and said immediately, 'I know you're Auberon Slade,' and he was so surprised—weren't you? Now, mamma, am I not very clever, and aren't you delighted? Do say something, please, for the credit of the family, for you're looking just exactly as if you'd never seen him before." Then, with a comical look of consternation, "I hope to goodness I haven't brought in the wrong man!"

"Oh, no, no! Daisy! My child, how wild you are!" replies Lady Gwynne, as she comes forward, with both hands outstretched, and takes those of the new comer in a firm, friendly grasp.

Her heart did give one tremendous leap, as the familiar face and figure came so suddenly before her, but the next moment it is quiet, for she marks a great change in Auberon Slade, traces the lines of care and suffering in his sharpened features, and her own feelings are absorbed in a desire to express her sympathy and interest in his.

"I am very glad to meet you again! It is but a moment since that I heard of your arrival."

He appears far more agitated by the renewal of old memories than she is. He has not found the same charm to lay them.

"You are very good. I knew you were staying here—but I hardly expected——How shall I apologise, Lady Gwynne, for this very abrupt intrusion on you privacy?"

"By making none! Were any needed, it would be the fault of this mad girl of mine."

"Mad, mamma! I do beg you will not take away my character in this reckless manner. That's all the thanks I am to receive, I suppose, for saving you the trouble of dodging this gentleman round the hotel for a month before you caught him. You know you wanted to see him. And because I happen to display a little more presence of mind than the generality of my sex, I am to be publicly apologised for. There's gratitude! However, I'm used to it!" and Miss Daisy pretends to flout in an injured manner about the room, whilst Mr. Slade's eyes follow her with evident admiration.

"You would not have known her again," says Lady Gwynne in a gratified tone.

- "No! not if I had met her in the street; but as soon as I heard her name, the features became familiar to me. She is just like what I always imagined she would grow up to be."
- "That is, you guessed I was Marguerite Gwynne, directly I told you so. What a gift the faculty of perception is! Mother! I've got an idea, we'll put off that dinner with the De Frelius to night; and Auberon shall dine with us up here. We shall be such a charming little party!"
 - "If Mr. Slade would like it, Daisy!"
- "You're never going to call him 'Mr. Slade,' mamma, are you? I'm sure we always called him 'Auberon' down at Warmouth."
 - "You may have done so, my dear!"
- "Well! then I shall do so still! I cannot see why friends should drop all their good old customs, just because they have not met

for a few years. It's so cold, and disagreeable, and English. And I remember him so well. Do you remember my cats, Auberon?"

"Perfectly—and how you used to throw the wretched creatures on my back directly I turned it to you."

"Ah, that must have been to teach you manners. What a deal you owe to me!—By the way, you have about a hundred children of your own now, haven't you?"

"I have two!" he answers with a smile.

"Only two? Good gracious! I thought there were at least a dozen. And are they here?"

"Yes! located somewhere at the top of this big building, with their nurse."

"Poor little dears! I must go and find them! How lonely they will feel. Are they boys or girls?"

[&]quot;Boys!"

"Oh! I'm glad of that! I like boys so much better than girls.—Mother's always sighing over my iniquity in not being a boy. As if I could help it! Are your boys big?"

"Not big enough for you I fear, Miss Gwynne! They are six and eight years old! I lost my first child and my last," he adds, by way of explanation to Lady Gwynne; "and these two, are I fear, very delicate, and need great care."

"The change will benefit them," she replies consolingly.

"Oh! I will undertake to make them all right," cries Daisy. "We shall be having such famous romps together before the week is out. Now, I'm going to find them; and write an excuse to the De Frelius, and tell François we dine at home to night. So good bye for the present," and with a nod she is gone.

Lady Gwynne's eyes follow her with such lingering affection, that she does not observe that Auberon Slade's are fixed upon her own face.

"Is she not lovely?" she demands presently.

"Very beautiful," is the hearty reply.
"I do not know, when I have seen a face that struck me more. Such life and colouring, and intelligence, combined with handsome features! You must be very proud of her!"

"Too proud I am afraid! sometimes! Do you know," with a laugh and a slight blush, "that she is considered so much like your old flame, Lady Mary St. Maur (the Duchess of Rocktown, as she is now), who was in Paris all last season?"

"Is she? I never thought Lady Mary St. Maur half so pretty! And Miss Gwynne

possesses a superior charm to me, in the resemblance which she bears to her mother!"

"To me, Mr. Slade? I never heard that before."

"Chiefly in her expression, I allow! But once or twice, she has already powerfully reminded me of yourself—as I can remember you during the first days we spent together at Felton."

He is looking straight at her, as he says this; and she cannot choose but colour, though she will not allow that the remembrance affects her.

"Have you seen anything of my old friends, the Calverts?" she asks abruptly.

"During the last year, I am glad to say, I have. Calvert and I did not speak for some time after meeting at Warmouth; but we ran against each other at the Club one day, and—he appears to be an excellent fellow after all,—and—"

"Oh! he is—he always was; and Emily Musgrave makes him so happy. Have they nice children?"

"Very nice, I believe, as far as children go—but I don't call myself a judge. There seemed to be an indefinite quantity of them, and they all looked fat and rosy. I wish mine were the same," with a sigh.

"I am sorry to hear your little boys are not strong."

"They were born strong enough, but they have been so mismanaged."

"But that is an error capable of remedy. You must look out now, for someone experienced in children, to take the charge of them. Have you a good nurse?"

"I believe so; but what servant can look after children like a mother?"

- "Well, you will give them a mother again, some day," she answers cheerfully.
- "Oh! I hope so—I suppose so. I fully intend to marry again, that is if I can get anyone to take me. But I am growing an old man now, Lady Gwynne."
- "What nonsense! When you have not a grey hair in your head."
- "Have I not? Look here," and lifting up the fair hair from his forehead, he shows her how it has turned white underneath. "And my only wonder is, that my head is not frosted all over. I have passed through sufficient since we parted to make it so."
 - "You are changed," she answers softly.

And indeed there is a careworn, delicate, ethereal look about Auberon Slade, as he now stands before her, which touches her heart very nearly; remembering what he was.

- "I am not only aged, but poverty stricken," he resumes, with an attempt at gaiety. "I have scarcely any money left."
- "But how is that? Have you been extravagant?"
- "Not more so, I think, than other men upon my income; I possessed two thousand a year. But living in London is naturally expensive, and then my poor wife was no manager, as you know," (with another deep sigh) "and, after the children came, she lost her health, and everything went to smash, and reduced our means one half. If you knew all that I have endured during the last ten years, Lady Gwynne, you would pity me."
- "Let us hope for brighter days," she replies cheerfully. "You have a long future still before you."

"If I don't make better use of it than I have of the past, it will be of little advantage to me. I have done nothing—literally nothing—since we parted. Do you remember our dreams of Fame, in the old days? and of a name to be built up, and handed down to posterity. My poor boys. Had they no worthier heritage in prospect, than what their father's brain may leave them, they would be paupers indeed.

"Here are the children," exclaims Lady Gwynne, thankful for the interruption, as Daisy re-enters the apartment, with a palefaced child in either hand. "Well, my dears, are you very tired? Won't you come and speak to me?"

She draws them to her, and presses a kiss upon either little cheek, and feels her own lip tremble as she does so. For both boys' faces are strikingly like that of their father, and the look most unaccountably thrills through her heart.

"This is Auberon, mother," explains Daisy, pushing forward the elder child, "and this is Walter. Auberon is to be your child, and Walter is to be mine. We've settled that already. Fancy, their being eight and six years old—I should have guessed them about two. And they can't read or write. Shocking little dunces! But I'm going to teach my child, and I bet he beats yours in a month. What will you pay me to be their daily governess, Auberon?"

"Anything you choose to ask," he replies quickly.

"Oh! come! that's liberal, but rather rash, for I might demand the whole of your income; not being cognisant of its amount."

"Even so—I think you would be welcome."

- "Just hear him talk, mamma! Is it you that have been putting him up to pay all these compliments during my absence? But now, are they not nice little boys? I'm in love with both of them already. And they're coming out in the Bois with me and their nurse to-morrow morning, and we're going to——"
- "Ride donkeys," interposes the elder child, fixing a pair of glistening eyes upon his father.
- "And drink new milk," adds the little one.
 - "And fly pink balloons, papa."
 - "And see dogs and monkeys dance."

They are both standing at his knee now, eagerly peering up into his face, but Walter will not let go of Daisy's hand.

"What a kind friend you have found," says Auberon Slade. "I hope you have

thanked Miss Gwynne for her good intentions."

"She's not Miss Gwynne, papa—she's Daisy."

"That's right, Auberon," cries Marguerite; "teach papa his duty."

"And I love her," interposes little Walter, "because she is so pretty!" and then, climbing up upon her lap, he adds, sentimentally, "I wish that you was my mamma, Daisy."

Auberon Slade the elder, smiles and colours, so does Lady Gwynne, but Daisy bursts into a loud laugh.

"Your mamma! you little rogue! That would be delightful—for everyone but me, I expect. Fancy, walking into possession of a family ready made—I don't think that's my style, mother, do you? So Auberon can set his mind quite at ease concerning my having any sinister intentions respecting

him! And now, my monkeys—you must come back to your tea. I promised the nurse not to be gone five minutes, and it's more than ten. Come quickly, or we shall all get into the most horrible disgrace!" and she leaves the apartment as she entered it, with the children clinging to her skirts.

Auberon Slade takes the opportunity to rise also.

- "I won't intrude upon you any longer, Lady Gwynne!"
- "But you will dine with us this evening, at eight."
- "With the greatest pleasure." And the next moment he has sprung after Daisy, and Lady Gwynne hears their voices commingling with the children's merry tones as all mount the staircase together; and hearing—slightly sighs.

CHAPTER X.

WAIT.

THE dinner is a great success. Daisy, arrayed in the dress in which she is to appear at the Embassy Ball that night, looks radiantly beautiful, and Lady Gwynne cannot help observing, that whether she speaks or sits in silence (an alternative the young lady seldom resorts to) Auberon Slade's eyes are fixed in speechless, but unmistakeable admiration upon her face.

She does not observe, however (what, had she been less ready to deny the possibility of his retaining an interest in herself, she might as easily have taken notice of) that his glance falls just as often on her figure, as robed in an old-fashioned costume of black velvet and point lace, she sits opposite to him at the dinner table, only that it isner-vously withdrawn before her own has even time to follow and detect it. And there are but few men in the world, who on this, as upon all occasions, would not prefer the appearance of the mother to the daughter, young, fresh, and blooming as Marguerite Gwynne may be.

For though the one face is all innocence, vivacity, and feeling, the other is impressed with the better and more enduring signs of a content that has surmounted sorrow, and a purity that has outlived the fires of a forbidden passion; the child's spirit is hopeful, but untried; the woman's has been weighed in the balance and found, not wanting!

The evening passes most agreeably: they laugh: they talk: they argue—they discuss the topics of Paris and the world at large: and no attempt is made on either side to rake up the ashes of the unhappy past.

Auberon Slade is bright, witty, and vivacious, as in the first days of their acquaint-ance; and Lady Gwynne's last impression that night, as she drives off with Daisy to the Ambassador's Ball, is of the earnest look, half soft—half eager—with which he leant upon the window of their carriage and bade them both good night. And the remembrance, drawing her back as it necessarily must do, to the days when that look was all in all to her, lulls her senses into a kind of dreamy retrospection of her youth, from which she is aroused by the decided opinion which Miss Gwynne passes on their late companion.

"An awfully jolly fellow, mother, and very clever—but much too sarcastic. Did you hear how he cut up poor dear old Calvert's way of talking? He's got funny eyes too: hasn't he? Rather nice at times, but small! I like big eyes, like Monsieur Martignon's. And Auberon's nose is too peaky! You don't call him handsome—do you, mother?"

"Oh! no! Daisy!" cries Lady Gwynne, with unnecessary haste and fervour.

"I thought not—however, he'll make a most delightful chaperon for me, and I may go anywhere with him (mayn't I?) because he's so old. He is going to ride with me to-morrow morning in the Bois."

"Why I thought you had promised to take the children in the Bois, Daisy!"

"No! Did I! not to-morrow morning?
I half believe I did though! Never mind;

they must wait till another day—because I am sure Auberon would be so dreadfully disappointed if I were to fail him. He is so pleased at falling in with us again, mamma, you can't think! He told me just now, this had been one of the happiest days of his life! I don't know whether he meant it for anything in particular—but I'm sure I hope not!"

- "Why so, my darling?"
- "Oh! mother! how can you ask? from a man three times my age! Why, if I thought it were! ——" with terrible emphasis.
- "What would you do?" demands Lady Gwynne, unable to help smiling at the girl's earnestness.
- "I'd—I'd—I believe I'd box his ears, mother."
 - "Oh! Daisy!" is the horrified rejoinder,

and then they are at the doors of the Embassy, and the confidence is over.

But, from that time, Auberon Slade is their daily companion, and he and his children, without any effort on Lady Gwynne's part, appear to become one family with her own.

He rides with Daisy in the Bois, joins her on the Boulevards, brings her stalls for the opera and boxes for the theatre; and though her mother is of course present on almost all these occasions, she cannot fail to see (or think she sees) that his attentions are paid solely with a view to gain her daughter's heart—and Daisy is so arch and lovely, and engaging (so the mother with a suspicious swelling in her own throat decides) that it would be impossible—simply impossible! that any man could see and associate with, and not desire to possess her.

The children fall to her share; a most unpleasant share (as people in general would consider it), for they are always lolling over her chair, or sitting at her feet, or clambering upon her knees. But Gwendoline Gwynne bears the annoyance sweetly (as she has borne so much already for his sake), even appears to like it, or one would suppose so to see her fondle and caress them when she thinks that she is unobserved. The boys like Daisy; they will romp and tumble with her, and pull down her hair, and steal her bonbons (generally presents from their father). but it is Lady Gwynne for whom they call the first thing in the morning, and the last thing at night; and whom they tell confidentially that they will "never, never leave in all their lives again."

And Auberon Slade, quick as he mostly is, to condemn the practice of parents palm-



ing off the company of their offspring upon strangers, seems curiously indifferent in this particular with regard to the probable inconvenience of poor Lady Gwynne; for though he constantly rebukes his boys for being rough, or tiresome with Marguerite, he smiles complacently whilst they inflict their sticky kisses on her mother, or refuse to go to bed, unless she also mounts the long, weary flight of stairs that leads to their apartments.

Well—well! if it gratifies him and her—by far the two dearest creatures in the world to Gwendoline Gwynne—she will never be heard to complain of either the inconvenience, or the apparent slight, that permits her to endure it. Only, sometimes, after having listened to the children's evening prayers—prayers which she herself has taught them—and tucked them up in bed,

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and been nearly squeezed to death by the vehemence of their last embraces—Lady Gywnne creeps down again, not to the salon where they are sitting, side by side in the moonlit verandah, but to her own room, and there hiding her face in her hands, shuts out every consideration but oneand tries to decide whether it will be for Daisy's happiness to become the wife of Auberon Slade. For matters have arrived at such a pass, that she can shut her eyes no longer to the fact that she must try and make up her mind to resign this cherished child, into the arms she once believed would enfold no woman but herself.

All that Auberon Slade has said to her lately, only seems to add to her conviction of the truth; he appears so evidently to be attempting to sound the feelings with which she will receive such a proposal on his part.

"I must marry again," he says decisively, as they sit together talking in the twilight, "if I am ever to make any name for myself in the world of literature. This kind of pleasant vagabondizing is all very well for a time; but it is fatal to steady composition. It is useless concealing from you, Lady Gwynne, that I was very unfortunate in my first venture. My children were neglected, my home mismanaged, and my life unhappy! I think that under other circumstances, I might, perhaps, have done something; as it was, all heart forsook me. and I felt myself daily dragged down to the level of my surroundings."

"It was very unfortunate!" she answers, quietly, "but, perhaps, your impatience rendered it more so than it need have

been. What are your ideas with respect to the *locale* of your future residence?"

"It is perfectly immaterial to me. Let it be France, Italy, or England—so long as I am left at liberty and peace."

"But, surely you will not find that difficult to command. Get a governess for your boys—or send them to a good school—and you will be free at once?"

He makes a gesture of impatience.

"Ah! you don't understand me! It is not only freedom I desire—it is comfort!—I want some one who will manage all my household affairs for me, love my children and myself—and take the lesser burthens of life off my hands—so that I may devote myself to study."

"Then you must get a wife"—with a sigh.

"That's just it-but who would take me?"

- "To talk like that is sheer nonsense! You have a good income and position, and are thirty-six years of age.—You might marry—almost anyone."
- "But I don't want to marry anyone, Lady Gwynne. There lies the difficulty! I am very particular; and perhaps the person I want may think I am—I am—."
 - "What?"
- "Oh! I don't know!" (nervously) "too old, too poor—too bad altogether to be counted worthy to obtain the blessing I desire."
- "You have then—I am to understand, that you have, already fixed upon your second choice."
 - "I have!" decidedly.
 - "I wish you every success."
- "I am sure you do! It is like yourself to say so, and mind you remember your

words when I most need them! Dear Lady Gwynne! tell me seriously, do you think there is any chance that a woman, knowing me to be what I am, would be rash enough to trust her happiness to my hands!"

"It would so much depend on who she was."

"Ah! true"—turning away with a deep sigh—"I was a fool to put the question. An ordinary girl might see nothing in such an offer—but one—one—Never mind, dear friend! do not let us talk of the subject any more, or I shall get the blues.
—Where are we bound for this evening? To which theatre does Daisy give the preference?"

Always Daisy—Daisy! Lady Gwynne can doubt no longer that Daisy's irresistible charms have dibbled a serious hole, even in the time-worn heart of Auberon Slade.

And the question which she asks her own heart is—can she, calmly—deliberately—contentedly—as a mother should—give up her daughter to his love and his embraces?"

She is quite sure that she has ceased to entertain any feeling for Auberon Slade except that of friendship—yet the heart flutters very considerably before it can reply—and the tears rise thickly to her eyes, and her hands tremble (much in the way of old), and yet she answers "yes;" but with this reservation, "in His strength I can."

But having formed this resolution, Lady Gwynne becomes unhappy to observe that

Marguerite has no correspondent feeling for her admirer; and that though she accepts his presents, and his escort, and his compliments, she is just as free in passing her opinion upon all his actions as she was at first, and has no hesitation in pointing out his failings to the notice either of himself, or others. And though this is her character, and conduct with respect to all her friends, her mother decides, and justly, that it is quite antagonistic to her receiving Auberon Slade as a lover, and, jealous for his honour and probable disappointment, she resolves at last, to speak to Daisy, and sound her on a subject so materially important to her happiness and his.

"Going to ride with Mr. Slade again to-morrow?" she exclaims, with well affected surprise, as the girl communicates the intention to her, "why you never ride with anyone but Mr. Slade now; he seems to have frightened all your other cavaliers away."

Daisy shrugs her shoulders.

"So he may—and welcome! for aught I care about them. Commend me to a French partner in a ball-room, mother, and an English one on horse-back. And Auberon can ride, if he can do nothing else."

"He would be amused to hear your scanty commendation, Daisy! But don't you think, my darling, that such constant attendance on his part may provoke people to talk! I am no prude, as you are well aware, but one cannot be too careful!"

"Talk of what, mother?"

"Of you both, dear, connect your names together! Mr. Slade is a marrying man, as everyone knows, and "——

But here the maternal harangue is interrupted by a loud laugh.

- "Mother! don't! you'll kill me."
- "But why—Daisy! what have I said?"
- "Mr. Slade a marrying man. And if he is, do you think it possible anyone would be such a fool as to connect his name with mine?"
- "I think it very probable," says Lady Gwynne, warming up under the mocking laugh—"he is young—good looking, and accomplished."
- "Young. Why, mother, he's nearly forty."
- "Well, child! what of that? Men of seventy marry girls of your age sometimes."
- "Ah! sometimes—but they don't marry me, and they never will. I wouldn't look at a man over five-and-twenty, and then

he must stand at least six foot in his stockings!"

Her mother sighs. She is thinking of Auberon's coming disappointment.

- "Do you really mean to tell me then that you have not observed Mr. Slade's predilection for yourself, Daisy?"
 - "I know he likes me—everyone does."
- "But I mean more than 'liking' child! admiration."
- "Of course he admires me—everyone does that too."
 - "And suppose he loves you?"
- "If he confines his love to making nice presents, and taking me wherever I want to go—I have not the slightest objection!"
- "And asks you eventually to marry him?"

 Daisy's heaven-blue eyes open to their widest.

- "The man's not mad, is he, mother? If so, you ought to have told me. I hope I haven't been shewing myself in the Bois by the side of an escaped lunatic all this time. People will talk, with a vengeance, if that's the case."
 - "Daisy, Daisy! you have no heart."
- "Indeed I have, darling; it's thumping and bumping about like fun at this very moment! But if you want me to give it to Auberon, I simply can't, and there's an end of it. I'd much sooner have one of the boys."
- "You have always appeared to like him so."
- "So I do like him, I'd like to have him to live with us always, and give him a jolly good kiss every morning and evening. He's got such a sweet mouth—I was very nearly kissing him to-day when he brought

me the bonbonière. Have you ever observed his mouth, mother, with that sunny little moustache just dropping over it, for fear it should prove too tempting?"

"I cannot speak to you about such nonsense, Daisy. The matter is far too serious to be made a joke of."

The girl looks alarmed.

- "I hope to goodness he hasn't said anything to you about it, mother."
- "Not a word, dear; only I cannot help fancying—"

Daisy looks relieved.

"Oh, if it's only your fancy, darling, take my word for it, it will never be realised. Auberon has too much sense to think of me. Besides, I've told him over and over, the kind of husband I want, and he has promised to look out for him for me."

"Then, could you really never think of Mr. Slade, Daisy?"

"As a stepfather, mother! Oh, willingly, if you'll begin to think of him too."

But the next moment the girl's countenance has fallen, and her face is hidden in her mother's bosom.

"Forgive me, dearest mother. I didn't mean to say that. It was horribly rude of me."

"It was thoughtless, darling; such things are beyond a jest. However, don't vex yourself about it, and du reste—we will not mention the subject again."

Still, although Gwendoline (believing a disappointment to be inevitable for him) does all she can to detach her daughter from the society of Auberon Slade, he seems to be always at her side or Daisy's, and each day brings nearer the communication,

which he is evidently only waiting for a fitting opportunity to make.

At last it comes—

"Lady Gwynne!" (with all the nervous agitation of a person who is uncertain how the proposition he is about to make will be received), "may I ask for a few minutes' conversation with you?"

"Certainly!"—and equally nervous with her companion, Lady Gwynne resettles herself in her arm chair. They are alone, and likely to remain so, for Daisy has gone to spend the afternoon with a friend.

"I have often spoken to you," commences Auberon Slade, looking anywhere but in her face, "of my intention to marry again, and you have been kind enough to say that it is not unreasonable. Still, perhaps, had you known that the person—

that the only woman, that I would—that I could—in fact, perhaps I ought to have told you——"

"Mr. Slade," she interrupts, pitying his confusion, and firmly believing that she knows the cause, "I think I can guess what you are going to tell me."

"You ought to be able to do so," he commences.

"And to save you from disappointment—or rather, from anything disagreeable, I think I ought to say at once—before you go further—that—that—"

His eyes are fixed now upon her face, and she breaks down before them.

"That there is no hope for me," he utters hoarsely.

"I think—that is—I am afraid not," is the compassionate reply; and then he buries his face for a moment in his hands,

whilst she looks down, like a pitying angel, upon his hidden grief.

Oh, it is hard!—doubly hard, remembering how, years ago, it was her fate to smite this heart—to be again the means of conveying to it a fiat of despair.

"My God!" breaks from him presently; but he says the words in a very low tone, and they are the only outward symptoms of his bitter disappointment.

"Auberon!" she ejaculates, after a pause. At her voice he lifts his eyes, and she is shocked to read the expression in them. "Oh, be comforted! try to bear it bravely! You don't know how hard it is for me to have to tell it to you."

"It ought to be so; it is not for the first time."

"I know it;" in a tone that slightly falters; "but don't blame her—it is my vol. III. 20

fault rather than hers. I thought I saw what was coming—but she is so young—so innocent—that——"

He has turned a face towards her, that is full of keen surprise.

- "Of whom are you speaking to me?"
- "Of my child—my Marguerite! It was wrong of me, I say, knowing all her fascinating ways and manners, to throw you so much with her; but until lately, believe me, I did not suppose——"
- "Gwendoline, you are altogether mistaken!"

It is her turn now to look astonished, both at his words and looks.

"What do you mean, then, Auberon?"

Her eyes gaze into his for a few seconds, almost affrightedly, and then, as their intention seems to burst upon her mind, she turns white as the lilies of June, and the quivering lids droop over them again.

"Gwendoline!" he exclaims, and as he speaks, seizes on her hand. "Do you pretend to tell me you do not know what I mean?—and that my lips have only been closed for this last weary month, because I could not dare believe, that after the consideration of ten years it was possible you could still care for such a worthless fellow as myself. But I love you, my own, my dearest, as I have never loved nor dreamed of loving, any woman but yourself! and I ask you, in the name of God, if you can conscientiously do so—to lay your hand in mine, and promise that you will give me an opportunity of striving to make up in some measure for all the misery I caused you?" She cannot speak, she cannot even see him, for her eyes are closed—but, blessed

be Heaven! she can hear, and one hand steals forth to clasp itself in his, whilst the other is laid upon his lowered head. "How could you believe that I had set my heart upon that saucy chit of yours? I admire her, for she is one of the most beautiful creatures I have ever seen; and I love her, because she is of you. But do you imagine that any girl in this wide world could make me forget what I owe to the woman, whose heart bled and suffered for me, as yours has done? I have never known a day's happiness since we, met or parted, Gwendoline! I have gone downdown-in the estimation of the world and myself, until I began to believe there was no lower depth for me to fall to. through it all I have held to one trembling hope—that at some future day, whether in this world or the next, God would permit me once again the blessing of your love!"

"Wait," she whispers softly,

"A perfect end, indeed," he answers, "if my ambitious hopes may but be realised. Oh, my beloved!—without you I have been nothing,—with you I feel I can do all things! If you will take me to your heart once more,—believe in me, and trust me as of old,—I shall rise upon the wings of my recovered faith till I reach the heights we dreamed of in our happy youth."

Aye, Auberon Slade! and higher still than these,—even to the summit of all things,—to Eternal Life itself.

"Gwendoline!-my love-my dearest.

Look at me and say that it is true,—that you do love me still."

She looks at him,—she sees him kneeling close beside her, with his eyes (filled with as warm a fire as ever kindled there in the days of their first passion) fixed upon her; and, with a cry of joy and gratitude, and love commingled, opens her arms and clasps him to her faithful breast.

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"What are you two conspirators laying your heads together for?" exclaims Daisy, a couple of hours later, as, without any warning, she bursts impetuously into the room, and discovers Auberon Slade and her mother in close proximity. "Hatching some plot against me, I'll be bound; but I tell you, once for all, I won't have it, mamma! If you are so giddy, I shall not be able to leave you by yourself. I declare, I never

turn my back for a minute but you get up to some mischief or other."

- "Oh, Daisy, darling!—don't be so wild," pleads Lady Gwynne, whose conscious face her daughter unmercifully scrutinises.
- "Mamma, dear, you've got such a colour! I believe that you have been rouging—and, so, I declare, has Auberon! Well, we are getting demoralised in Paris."
- "Daisy, do be serious! I want to tell you something," says her mother, imploringly.
- "Good heavens! what can it be? Don't say that Amalie has sent me home the fern wreath instead of the acacia, for I won't wear it, and I told her so."
- "It's nothing about Amalie, my dearest!"
- "Then you are going to put off Blankenburgh this year, and go to those German

baths again. It won't do, mother; I've set my heart on Blankenburgh."

"You shall go all round the world if you wish it, Daisy," replied her mother.

"Excuse me," interposes Auberon Slade; "but I hope you won't be rash about making promises of that sort, Lady Gwynne."

"And pray, what right have you to interfere, sir?" — demands Marguerite saucily.

"Oh, Marguerite, be steady for a moment."

And Daisy sees the tears standing in her mother's eyes, and is sobered immediately.

"I want to speak to you, my darling, of something that concerns you and me—and all of us—very nearly. I don't know what you'll think of it, Daisy. I am afraid it will be rather unexpected news;

but if the prospect should be displeasing to you, my own dear child,—my sweet girl,—why, I—I—"

"For God's sake, don't say you'll change your mind!" exclaims Auberon Slade, in a fright, at which she smiles.

"You have told her now, Auberon. Daisy must guess it all. My darling, we knew each other, years and years ago,—and—and—I hope—that is, I believe—it will be for your happiness as well as mine, and—"

But here Lady Gwynne is interrupted by Daisy casting herself into her arms, and bursting into a flood of tears.

"My own mother! I am so glad. Oh! how I pray you may be as happy as you deserve to be."

And for a few minutes, nothing is to be heard but the sound of her girlish sobs, and her mother's whispered blessings and caresses.

"How charming it will be," cries Daisy, springing up and laughing, whilst the tears are still standing on her eyelashes, "to have him living with us, and to be able to tease him all day long. But I never—no! not if he lives to be a hundred and fifty years old—I never can call Auberon 'Papa!"

It is such an unexpected turn to the sentimentality of the occasion, that everyone welcomes it with a laugh.

"I don't care what you call me, you saucy child," says Auberon Slade, as he bestows a paternal kiss on Daisy's blooming cheek. "Tom, Jack or Jerry—it is all the same to me—so long as your mother calls me 'husband."

And then, as his eyes turn to rest fondly on the face of Gwendoline Gwynne, and his hand seeks her own again, he murmurs, in a voice which is heard by one ear only:—

"Then draw me closer, closer to thee, dear.

Do what we will, thy fate and mine are fixed,
My life and thine, inevitably mixed,
We take our destiny and do not fear;

"Yes! all of self has sweetly died in me,
Thy noble heart is beating in my breast;
No one shall steal it now—there, let it rest;
And know, dear love, that I am lost in thee!"

THE END.

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